SEPTUAGINT COMMENTARY SERIES

Tobit

The Book of *Tobit* in Codex Sinaiticus

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BRILL

The Sinai Codex

When the past refuses to be forgotten

EM Margesson

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For Nick, Rhys and Polly

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Chapter 1 303AD The First Purge

Diocletian gritted his teeth. He stared into the goblet of ruby liquid, its swirling depths reflecting the gleam of the lavish imperial lighting, The chamber was silent, now. Not a peaceful silence. The silence was more like the moment after a clap of thunder, the tension that asks for a response of greater strength. A score of soldiers and attendants stood ready, waiting for the Emperor's wrath.

The messenger still held the unfurled scroll, motionless with fear. On it were written the words of the oracle of Apollo at Didyma, the words whose impact still echoed around the chamber.

The tension was broken by Galerius, who got up from his recliner and walked over to the golden washstand, dipped his hands into the water and took the proffered cloth to dry them. He was the only one in the room qualified to speak in the presence of his Emperor at this moment.

"I was right," he said, "the Christians are responsible. Apollo cannot communicate with us while the impious remain among us, worshipping their man-god instead of the true deities. They must be eradicated."

Diocletian responded with a flick of his wrist, sending the goblet skimming across the marble floor, spattering its dark red contents across the white robes of the slaves attending him.

"Your suggestion is too severe," he said. I will not tolerate the measures that you desire. Even Apollo cannot mean for us to do this. We need only to ban these people from positions of officialdom and the military."

"No!" Galerius responded, "We must exterminate this religious sect and we can do it. Have you not heard? Apollo himself has spoken and revealed that they are responsible for the ills of our land. Like the Manicheans in Egypt that you purged last year, we need to end their meetings, destroy their places of worship and burn their scriptures. They cannot be allowed to oppose our ancient traditions with their new ways."

Diocletian stood, raising himself to his full height, making a gesture that emptied the chamber so quickly that under a minute later, he stood facing Galerius alone. "You dare to challenge me, Galerius? As my Junior Caesar? Yes, I have given you authority to act in my name in the Eastern Empire, but remember that you are still under my orders, you still act as I decide. My edicts are given in my time, under my will, do you understand?"

Galerius moved deliberately to his junior throne, sitting and lowering his head in respect.

"Forgive me, Sir," he said, "my passion for the Pantheon runs deep. I cannot see our gods betrayed. These Christians are gathering strength and right here in this city of Nicomedia, their refusal to sacrifice to Olympus has proved to be the reason for so much bad fortune."

Diocletian knew that such a show was manufactured purely to restore order between them. At the same time, he remembered that the power he had chosen to delegate to his junior only ten years before was well allocated. Galerius had achieved so much in this short time that, together with their

counterparts, Maximium and Constantius, in the Western Empire, the power and stability of Rome was already growing beyond all their hopes and imaginings.

He looked at the young campaigner before him. He remembered Galerius' heroism of just a few years before when he had coordinated and executed the destruction of Ctesiphon in Persia, making it possible for him to sweep in with negotiations for a peace that still looked more stable than any Emperor had achieved for decades. He might be hot-headed when it came to matters of religion but he was more valuable to him than he dared say.

Until recently they had thought along the same lines. Then this difficulty of the boldness of the Christ-followers had arisen and their refusal to offer sacrifices traditionally was becoming a serious problem. Perhaps Galerius was right. It had to be addressed, and soon. This was as good an idea as any.

"You want the Christians wiped out?" he said eventually, "Well, my wise Ceasar, it shall be done. I will issue an edict against the scriptures, churches, and meetings from this present moment."

"They have only just completed their church building here," said Galerius with a smile, "let us start with its destruction."

Diocletian swallowed. A show of strength was important. "Bring the court back in," he ordered. As they filed back to take their places, he gestured for the edict to be recorded. "From tomorrow, it shall be known across the Western and Eastern Empires, that all scriptures and books of the Christians together with their places of worship must be destroyed, that they are prohibited from meeting together for worship. Let this be done."

His eyes met those of Galerius and felt no regret, even though he knew exactly what would happen next. There would be martyrs of course, since many of these Christians would refuse to accept their fate. They would be burnt, boiled, crucified, tortured in all sorts of ways that he didn't want to think about. Some would run and hide, taking their precious scriptures with them, to squirrel away for later retrieval. They would be pursued by his soldiers, experts in knowing where they would go and what needed to be done to make them turn and sacrifice to the Roman gods as they should.

They would try to keep on meeting, he supposed, not in their traditional buildings, which would be destroyed with ruthless efficiency, but in their houses, in the woods, the mountains and beyond the reaches of the civilized world. Galerius was right, thought Diocletian, they must be pursued and eradicated so that Apollo and the rest of the Pantheon could bring blessing and fortune to the whole Empire.

Only the wisdom of his gods could prevail.

Chapter 2 Day 1, London

The usually silent landline was ringing. Thea ignored it, too wrapped in warm sleep to respond. As it persisted, her irritation grew. Was Dad not home yet? She extended a hand to her phone, saw the time and read the familiar text, sent after she'd gone to bed. Working late, something big, blah blah. But no missed calls.

Another minute or so passed and the phone rang on, its rare and bland ring tone echoing down the hallway. It wouldn't be for her, more likely some archaeologist friend of Dad's from the other side of the world, forgetting the time difference.

Eventually, she responded, heaving the duvet aside and stumbling into the living room, preparing a scathing retort for the caller and Dad when she saw him in the morning, about being woken up in the small hours when she had work the next day.

"Thea, is that you? Oh, my darling girl," the voice cracked with sobbing and she recognized the unmistakable tones of her aunt.

"Lara? What's the matter?"

"Is he back? Is he there?" she squeaked.

"No, he sent a message though, he's just working late, you know how…"

"Oh God, no!" Lara whispered, "no, it can't be true, he can't be…"

"You're scaring me, what's going on?"

"Oh Thea, there's been a… it's terrible, I can't… please, turn on the news. There was a bomb, and if he's there…" as her voice dissolved, Thea grappled for the TV remote in the unlit room and reeled as images of her father's workplace darkness flickered at her, with plumes of smoke billowing out of the windows. She peered at the picture more carefully, trying to work out the angle on the building, trying to guess where it had gone off.

"It might not be that bad…" Thea found herself saying.

"Maybe he is on his way home? Maybe he left before it happened?" Lara's voice continued to whine in her ear. Thea checked the time of the text against the time of the explosion from the news report, working out that he must have sent it minutes before.

"Have you tried phoning him?"

"Of course! It was the first thing I did."

She stared at the text, at what might have been Dad's final words, re-reading them, wanting to hear him say them out loud to her, right here.

"Thea? Are you there?"

"He hadn't left," she heard herself say, "he sent me a text just before it happened."

"I'm coming down. I'll be there soon. Thea, my girl, be strong…"

"Okay," Thea pressed the off button and it rang again straight away. She didn't answer, hypnotized by the news on the huge screen that filled her vision. The shot was no longer of London, this was somewhere else, a different reporter standing in front of another darkened, broken building, peering through clouds of smoke. The words at the side of the screen changed: Washington, Cambridge, Leipzig, Moscow… Each reporter

seemed to reflect her confusion, looking back at her with baffled fear, pressing forefingers to their ears, desperate for guidance.

As she stood with the TV remote in one hand and the landline phone, still ringing, in the other, she felt a strange sense of relief - that if something bad had happened to him, at least this time it was not her fault.

Lara wasn't the first to arrive. First came the police to tell her that they had found his body, then Stanley, the porter from downstairs, to check she was okay. She wasn't allowed to go to the site yet, too dangerous. All she could do was watch TV and to those who passed through, replying to them without making eye contact, that yes, she was doing okay.

The tone of the news reports changed as interviews with medical and security eye-witnesses revealed that the body count was very low. When everything was confirmed and Dad's official photo was eventually displayed, alongside a few others named as fatalities, it seemed to Thea that it was all happening outside of her and she just wanted to know what exactly had happened. She focused on the information they were giving her, finding it easier than she expected to think about the facts.

The news said that the target of this widespread bombing campaign did not seem to be human life. Museums and libraries had been destroyed and some security guards had perished together with a few staff working overnight; but opening hours were avoided, so no tourists or visitors were among the dead.

They suggested that a theme was emerging. Around twenty different institutions throughout Europe and the Middle East had been attacked and the link between each one was very specific. The terrorist group had targeted areas of libraries and museums containing ancient Biblical manuscripts. Nothing else.

The group responsible had not yet given themselves a name.

Commentators said that places of Jewish and Christian worship might be poorly attended over the weekend, and organized faith communities would be thinking about their security. Perhaps this was a warning, they said,

pointing to something bigger. The news agencies wound themselves up to a new level of paranoia, suggesting that vast numbers of human lives were still at risk.

More was to come but it was not mass murder. The terrorist attack moved from the physical to the digital, as servers around the world were wiped of very specific data. Christian and Jewish organizations watched as their sites were deleted before their eyes and online Bibles and other forms of scripture could no longer be accessed. Any search carried out on any browser using the words 'Jesus Christ', 'Bible', 'Moses', 'Talmud' or 'Testament' now returned *zero* as the number of references found. Any online text in blogs, posts, tweets, and sites containing these same words simply disappeared. Cloud storage failed and any computer, tablets, phone or e-reader with an Internet connection no longer stored texts containing these words in their files or libraries.

The terror event and those who had caused it began to be referred to as Error 404.

An advanced and powerful strain of viruses had breached every firewall, no level of protective sophistication sufficient to resist their message of vehement rejection; that any teaching of Judaism or Christianity had ceased to exist. Nothing could be retrieved, not by the finest of hackers, drafted in their numbers, no matter how criminal. None of them could retrieve the information.

It had all disappeared.

Error 404 seemed to have risen from nowhere and everyone was desperate to know who was behind it. Pundits discussed the options against official denials from the Russians, Chinese, far-right groups and South American drug cartels. No-one was owning up.

In the main meeting chamber of the United Nations in New York, the security council discussed the issue of World Heritage Sites and how they should protect the past from these new hooligans. As the conversation moved on, it was considered that the written heritage of the Judeo-Christian world might have been erased but the modern world, with its secular

priorities of averting environmental catastrophe and global poverty had bigger problems.

Chapter 3 Day 8, Carbrooke

Lara had organized the funeral to the last detail.

"Yes, I know what he believed, my dear," she said, "but given the current climate we'd better be on the safe side and have a secular ceremony, don't you think?"

Thea was too numb to argue and hadn't protested when Lara arranged a car to collect her from the flat in London so that she would get up to Carbrooke in Norfolk on time. Now, almost there, she slumped against the window, unmoved by the familiar paths and hedges of her childhood, not even shielding her hand against the low sun that picked at her eyes. The school, the park and now their old church. It looked tired and lost, and about as far away from Dad as she had felt lately.

"You want to spend any time here?" the driver asked, looking around at her, "Miss Summers said you might?"

Lara, always presuming. Thea paused, twirling an auburn curl around her finger, studying its variety of gold and dark brown. There was indeed a reason why she might want to get out here and it brought a chill riding up her forearms.

"Okay."

She got out and walked through the churchyard, her feet taking her in the right direction through the dull, grey stones that seemed cold and sullen in their silence.

The grave she stopped at had been looked after. Someone had cleaned it recently and planted garish flowers in yellow and purple. The stone itself was a little weathered but neat and respectful. She didn't need to look at the words to know what was written there.

Katherine Summers, 42, and Finn Summers, 7. Now on their everlasting adventure.

It was a mistake to get out of the car. She could hardly see her way back for angry tears flooding her vision. Stupid, sentimental Lara.

As they turned into the crematorium fifteen minutes later, the driver parked in a space marked 'reserved' and switched off the engine. Thea looked through the tinted glass at mourners as they drifted in, slowly picking their way down the cracked tarmac path in their neat suits, hands clasped awkwardly in front of them. Anxiety fizzed through her like an electric shock and her hands trembled as she fumbled with the zip on her jacket. Perhaps jeans weren't appropriate after all.

Shouldering the coffin, she couldn't acknowledge the faces turned towards her, preferring to press her face against the foliage and to stare at her Converse-clad feet. She shut everyone else out during the rest of the ceremony, staring at her cuticles and wishing it was over.

Afterward, pity filled up space around her and made people say the same things as each other. Such a wonderful man, wasn't he? So impressive and wasn't she lucky to have had him as a father and how sorry they were for her loss and could they do anything? Again and again and again. So unbelievably unimaginative and needy, like they expected her to comfort them. She nodded without listening until Lara lead her away, putting her back in the car which took her to a bland hotel where flowers and cakes and wine glasses made it feel more like a wedding than a wake.

If she could get through this day. If she could avoid thinking about before. When everyone said things would work out, even though it didn't. Funerals were excuses to lie, she thought, the biggest lie being that once it was all over, life could carry on as normal.

She found a table where no-one was sitting, turned her chair to face the wall and pulled out her phone, hoping they would all leave her alone.

They did, for a while.

"You're going to have to snap out of it, Theodora." A chair scraped beside her and someone collapsed heavily into it. Curiosity forced her to turn to see who had joined her. Thea found herself confronted by watery-blue eyes swimming under bushy gray eyebrows on a pale, liver-spotted face, the jaw quivering with age.

"Who are you?" she asked.

"Daniel Grayson, Professor of Divinity at Cambridge University," he sighed, "he never mentioned me?"

Thea shrugged and looked back at her phone, "No."

Grayson ignored her hostility, "I taught your father Theology at Cambridge years ago. We have worked together on many projects since then. Important, ground-breaking projects, some of which are not complete."

She didn't reply, scrolling through her newsfeed.

In her peripheral vision, Grayson moved awkwardly, trying to catch her attention and the tone of his voice changed, "I need you to listen," he said, "I can't begin to explain how much danger you're in."

Thea felt goosebumps rise on her arms but shook off the fear, getting up to rid herself of him.

He caught her arm with a weak grip. "Your father's work has the attention of dangerous people," he whispered, "don't you realize that? … I need you to…" He paused, breathing deeply before continuing in a voice so quiet that she couldn't help leaning in to listen, "there is something that he was working on... something big. The world needs it more than ever now. I need you to find it for me before they do…"

Thea shook off his grip, frustrated, "I'm not sure what he told you," she said, trying to needle him, "but his work wasn't exactly saving the world." She thought back to the last time she had visited him at the British Library a few years ago when she was home from Uni, showing off original Beatles songs in the climate-controlled Reading Room, pointing out John Lennon's

handwriting to her star-struck friends, all wearing their silly white cloth gloves and face-masks. She knew that his main passion was the study and curation of a fourth-century copy of the Bible, the Sinai Codex, but she didn't want to give away too much. This old man had to prove himself first.

"Your father's job was to protect the past. To safeguard the truth for the future."

Thea thought of the British Library and her father's offices, destroyed. The manuscripts that Henry Summers had looked after all his life were now just extra motes of dust in the London air.

"It's sad, I get that," she said, "but will future generations suffer for not having the original handwritten lyrics of Yellow Submarine?"

She watched Grayson carefully, looking for his response.

His face crumpled, "your father's contributions to worldwide scholarship on ancient Biblical manuscripts are unparalleled," the old man said, "but it did not all die with him. Please, Thea, you must help me…and yourself!"

Thea closed her eyes, the emotions of the day boring in between her eyes making her crave the solitude of the car.

"Great damage has been done," He continued, "all of these destroyed documents were our evidence that the Bible has been passed down accurately throughout the past millennia. Now there is nothing left to prove this." The voice whispered, insistent. "London was only the start of it. My collection in Cambridge was next, then Oxford, Dublin, Durham, Manchester; and that's just the UK. It has continued across the libraries and museums of Europe and the Middle East. Hundreds of thousands of fragments, codices, scrolls, papyri, all obliterated."

"To be honest," she said, "I don't care about the Bible or God. Religion means nothing to me. I just want Dad back."

The calm response was controlled and precise. "If you cared about him at all, then join with me in making sure his work was not in vain," he said.

Grayson sounded more and more like a madman. Thea looked around, longing for someone to walk past and rescue her.

"Your father spent his career looking after one text in particular. But it wasn't complete. When Stalin sold it to the British in 1937, it was already missing some books of the Old Testament. Your father has spent much of his life trying to find these missing sections. In January, a few months ago, he picked up a lead. Wouldn't it be wonderful if we could retrieve the rest of it? If we could prove to the world that these Error 404 people have not completely cut us off from the past?"

Thea felt a kindling of desire for revenge. For her father's killers to fail; the thought thrilled her. "Will these hidden documents show us who Error 404 is?" she asked.

Grayson nodded his head slowly. "Perhaps. But if they pick up on what he was looking for, they may come to you anyway. Let's stay one step ahead of them. Go home and look for any notes, sketches, email addresses, plans, that your father might have in the flat and let me know. In particular anything about Ezekiel… Send it to me by courier at the Faculty of Divinity, Cambridge. I'll pay whatever costs you incur. Please, if you find something, get it to me. I'll be working there night and day on projects of my own. Projects that may also bring Error 404 down."

He stood up, wincing with pain and grappling with a pair of metal crutches. Thea saw that his entire leg was in plaster.

"What happened to you?" she asked.

"When the Bezae Codex was targeted at the university library, I was in the next room," he said, clearly downplaying what had happened, "I was lucky." He hobbled slowly out of the room. He must be in pain, she thought. Her sympathies towards him grew. She wanted revenge on these people and if she could make them look like fools by proving them wrong, she wanted in.

"Who was that?" A jowly, pink-faced man in an ill-fitting suit appeared in front of her. He held a Mr. Kipling cake in one hand and a half-finished beer

in the other.

Thea ignored him, putting her coat on.

"Excuse me, I recognize you. You're Thea? Henry's daughter, aren't you?"

"Do I even know you?" Thea replied, sure he wasn't a relative.

"Brian Truman," he answered, putting down the cake and holding out a slightly greasy hand, "I often worked the security night shift in your father's section at the British Library. We sometimes talked when he worked late. Sometimes about you; he said you didn't get on well. Anyway, I just thought I recognized that bloke on the crutches. Some professor guy, right?"

"Yeah, I think so." She said, trying to get past him, irritated by a stranger knowing about her and Dad, "look I don't want to be rude, but…" she suddenly had a thought. "Wait, the night shift, you said?"

"That's right."

"But not *that* night, then?"

He looked at his feet, "Yeah, I was and I'm just about filled to the brim with survivors' guilt. You know what that is?"

Thea nodded. Counselors had explained it to her after Finn and Mum died. The crushing guilt that she wasn't dead too.

"Well, I'd finished my shift just before it happened. That's not strictly true. I had to, you know, well, I'd had a bit of a fierce curry before coming into work and I needed to visit the gents'. I wasn't going to use the library toilets, that's for sure. I know this little night cafe down the street. More private, you know. The place blew up while I was on the can. Scared the, well, you know…" he trailed off and she looked at him in bewilderment. Had he any idea what he was saying? She tried to help him out, almost feeling sorry for him as he foundered.

"What did you think of my Dad?"

Brian smiled with relief, "Everyone liked him. He was good to me when I joined the team; friendly and that, so I wanted to be here today. I hope that's okay."

Thea sighed, still wanting to go but he followed her through to the next room, "Yeah, sure."

"That's my wife, Morrie, over there. Anyway, I'm so sorry for your loss."

Thea looked over at an older woman in funereal black, who glanced over and saw them looking at her. She waved, then put her hand on her heart and her head on one side in sympathy.

"Your Dad…" Brian was still talking.

"Sorry?" she turned, thinking he'd gone.

"He… did you ever talk about, that is, did he mention a name to you ever, something called the Logos?"

Thea squinted at him, resisting the glare of a piercing ray of sunlight which she had walked into. "No."

"Are you sure, I mean, I think he spent a lot of time…"

"Look," Thea cut him off, "He did his job at the British Library working on those documents but I wasn't interested in what he did and I never heard that name."

He ignored her angry tone. "Well, if you ever happen to come across it, I wonder if, maybe you could let me know?" he handed her a scrap of paper with a phone number on it. She gritted her teeth and stuck it in her back pocket.

"Fine," she said, knowing she would throw it away.

"Thanks," he smiled and sauntered off, without getting the message.

"Oh, I'm so sorry my dear," his wife appeared at her elbow, much shorter than she'd seemed from across the room, "my Brian, he does go on, he's been so affected by what happened. It was going to be his last month or so at the library. Forced to retire a little earlier than he thought and he's going through it right now. Do forgive him."

Did this woman want something too? Her Chanel scent was overpowering. Thea couldn't help but imagine this woman sitting on her own in the dark, wearing that perfume, waiting for her husband to come home. She was glad for her sake that Brian wasn't dead.

"Thank goodness for curry, eh?" Thea said with a grim smile.

Mrs. Truman looked at her with confusion. "I'm sorry?"

"The curry he ate? Not being there when the… you know?"

"Oh my dear, Brian won't eat curries. He's dairy-free these days. The amount of cream and milk they put in. Oh no, he's been off anything like that for years now! Now I must go and leave you to your family. I'm so sorry for your loss."

Thea had had enough of this. Nothing seemed to make sense anymore. Morrie's velvety hands patted her forearm, then left. It was extraordinary how funerals made everyone think that personal space no longer mattered.

Five o'clock came and no-one else had asked her for any more favours. The quiet interior of the car welcomed her with relief as she pulled away and headed back South but she felt unnerved and displaced. At least she would have some peace while she searched for the notes that Grayson had told her about. Now the funeral was over, she could go back to work and they would all leave her alone.

Chapter 4 Day 9, London

The next day, the flat felt oppressive and she couldn't be bothered to look for the notes that Grayson told her about just yet. She had a scheduled

appointment with a new counselor and it was already paid for. She probably needed it more than ever now.

"Tell me about your family."

Thea breathed in slowly, the room calm and the sofa beneath her soft enough not to have to think about anything but the process of getting to grips with the subject that she feared most.

"So. Your brother, what was he like?"

Every week for over six years she'd had therapy of some sort. If she'd ever thought it was her choice to go to counseling, her whirling mind reminded her of the truth. She relied on these people to help her and knew there was no point holding anything back.

"He was four years younger than me."

Her heart clutched at the information as it left her mouth, wanting to protect him, feeling like she was giving part of him away, betraying him.

"What did he look like?"

A photo leaped to mind. One that her Dad had had on his desk at home.

"He had blond hair. Kind of dark around the back, behind his ears and above his neck. Freckles, blue eyes. His skin would go brown in the sun. I just burned but he didn't." The memories opened like a long exposure on a camera shutter, then closed again.

"What did he like doing?"

Thea resisted the memory as it prodded at her to be free, as she thought of him in their old home in Carbrooke. The house where they'd each had a room across a landing which was wide enough for him to challenge her to jump across it without falling down the stairwell. She thought of him coming into her room without permission, kicking her stuff around. She remembered the way that she would get in trouble whenever things went sour, not him. She missed that house. They had moved from Carbrooke to

London, her and Dad, almost immediately after they died in the desert since he couldn't bear to stay.

"He was always on the go. He never stopped. He wanted to play the whole time."

"And you played with him?"

"Yeah, most of the time." Most of the time when he wasn't playing his stupid jokes on her with plastic vomit and fake flies.

"When you went on holiday with your family to…" she was looking at her notes, trying not to create a pause, "…to Egypt, how old were you then?"

"I was eleven. Dad wanted to take us along with him on one of his trips."

"What sort of trips?"

"I don't know, all I know is that we were just on holiday but there was always more to it than that for him."

The memory of the early stages of that trip was taking a hold of her, the good bits, the times they'd spent together. A meal in a little cafe in a remote village came back to her. Smiling people, comfortable cushions on the floor, stuffing herself with flatbread, humous, olives and dates. Sleepily listening to the adults talking in different languages, her brother already asleep, a rare moment when he wasn't working out how to annoy, when his feet weren't chasing her, fingers poking her, laughing at her as he ran away.

'Tell me about that night.'

That night. 'Which night?' she said, buying time.

'When it happened.'

Yawning darkness opened up beneath her and Thea gripped the cushions either side of her as though the sofa was a roller-coaster about to descend into a drop that never ended. She felt her brain freeze, rigid with fear. She

needed to explain that she couldn't, not now, probably not ever, tell her what happened.

'Sorry…' she felt her voice vibrating somewhere behind her ears, hammering deep in a void so big that it couldn't possibly reach the outside world.

'Take it slowly. Let me get you to focus on one thing at a time. You were camping?'

'Yes. Dad wanted us to meet some Bedouin. We'd taken the jeep into the desert…'

Dad. It was his fault but she was the one facing the questions. She anticipated the accusations of guilt that would be coming her way. She would have to confess her part in it yet again. Maybe this time it would be different, she would explain and this woman would say it wasn't her fault like they always did and maybe it actually wouldn't be this time. Instead, there would be peace and forgiveness and that would be it for the rest of her life. She wouldn't lie awake every night in a pool of self-hatred, longing for the light. She could be free from it all.

No, somehow she knew that even after this session, after all of the time and money and effort, nothing would have changed. It would all still be the same.

'Finn wouldn't go to sleep. Mum and Dad were outside, sitting by the fire on their own, watching the stars. I'd kept shouting to them that he wasn't going to sleep. They would tell him to be quiet but he started up again each time. Then they started telling me off for moaning about it. So I told him, I said, 'Finn, I'm going to count to a hundred and you've got to go outside and hide somewhere without Mum and Dad noticing. I'll come and find you and when I do you have to come back here and go to sleep and not disturb me until the morning.'

Thea stopped. She was always amazed at how clear in her memory that part was. She remembered it like she was watching it on a film. Like it was

someone else doing it and she was sitting watching and shaking her head at the ignorance, the sheer stupidity of the girl who had done it.

'I started counting and out he went. It was so nice and quiet without him there. I'd solved the problem all by myself. I even thought Mum and Dad would be proud of me for working it out.'

The next bit was always the hardest. Thea's throat constricted and she needed all of her focus and attention just to breathe through her nose, letting the small amount of air that could get through to her lungs do its job.

'What happened next?'

Thea breathed in through her mouth and out through her nose. She needed to focus.

'It's okay, take your time.'

That's exactly what she would do. Flashbacks about this part often attacked her with a sinister ferocity and she had long forgotten what order it had all happened in.

She just remembered her mother's face lit by the dawn light and contorted in panic as she'd never seen before, her father's fear, the front flap of the tent flipping back on itself, a frenzy in the wind. Snapping hard, quick, like a whip. Fine particles of sand smothering her, filling her nose and mouth. Painful outbursts, accusations, questioning. Being held by the shoulders and shaken with yelling stifling her ears. The decision she took not to say anything in case they hated her even more. The emotions and physical sensations of it visited her now with their random jabs of pain.

'There was a sandstorm. Finn was missing. It was my fault. Mum… she ran off into it looking for him while Dad was talking to me about it. She didn't come back.'

There was silence. She knew that the counselor felt the same way as everyone did when they heard about it. They realized how disgusting she

was. How much she was to blame. Then she heard the lie that all of them always told.

'It wasn't your fault.'

Thea felt a sudden resignation. This is how it would always be. It was almost like a dull echoey voice in her skull. She would pay for what had happened for the rest of her life. So she better just get used to it.

She sat up, rubbing the back of her neck. 'Thanks, that helped.' She said blankly. 'I've got some work to do now so I think I'll go now.'

The counselor glanced at her watch. 'Are you sure? You've got another twenty minutes.'

'No, it's okay. I think there's been a breakthrough. I feel different about it.'

'Okay, great! I think that we need another few sessions though. Same time next week?'

Thea forced a grin and nodded her head, picked up her bag and let herself out. Nothing would ever change.

She wandered back to the tube station and without even thinking, she had traveled the half-hour journey back to her stop. The Barbican. She looked up at their tower block, just *her* tower block now, and wondered if she would ever be able to look at it without thinking about him in it.

She couldn't face going up there right away. She decided to walk around a bit first, before deciding which of Lara's ready meals she would microwave for dinner. She followed the ugly staircase up to the podium level and along through the open walkway until she reached the other side of the complex and descended to the open square that surrounded St Giles' Cripplegate, the ancient church that had stood firm while the city had ebbed and flowed around it.

The Summers had a family link to the church, a legend that they had been brought up on and it pulled her here right now. She had to check in, see the

plaque, remind herself of where she belonged, while everything else dissolved around her. They had an ancestor, Sir Edmund Somers, a knight in the sixteenth century, who was commemorated inside the church. Sir Edmund had not returned from his pilgrimage to the Holy Land but somehow it came to be known that he had died in a battle off the Mediterranean coast, fighting pirates. Finn had loved that story and constantly wanted to re-enact it, insisting that Thea should be the knight taking the fatal blow while he was the treacherous pirate captain.

Sir Edmund had been denied recognition in their local Carbrooke church because of the collapse of his order, the Knights of the Hospitallers when Henry VIII had ordered the dissolution of the monasteries. The priests at Cripplegate, here in London, had permitted the memorial, raised by funds donated by returning pilgrims who were grateful for the help he had given them in Jerusalem.

Thea realized now that the proximity of St Giles' church was probably the main reason that Dad had wanted them to move to the Barbican in the first place. She walked into the cool interior and shivered a little in the unheated March air, pulling her coat more tightly around her. It muffled the noise of the city, although she could still hear the faint wail of police sirens.

Passing by the ends of the pews, she walked down the side aisle of the church, looking up at the stone columns and stained-glass windows, wondering if they put the heating on for services. The plaque was one of three on the back wall, behind one of the huge free-standing graves that took up a couple of square meters of floor space.

As she approached it, she heard a door close at the opposite end of the church and turned to see a woman appearing from the vestry door to the left of the chancel. She carried a large cardboard box which she set down on the red and black tiles of the central aisle. She was wearing a neat grey blazer with a smart metal badge, her grey hair styled in a bob which swung around her face as she moved along the second row of pews, picking up Bibles and stacking them in her arms.

"Do you want some help?" Thea asked, wanting to make her presence known. The woman jumped, eyes wide, holding her free hand to her chest.

"You scared me!"

"Sorry, I thought it was okay to come in…"

"Oh yes, of course, I was just… well, miles away. Thinking about everything that's happened, I suppose, isn't it all so awful?"

Thea slipped into the pew parallel to her and saw that the little metal badge on her lapel identified her as a *Friend of St Giles* . She watched as the nervous woman placed the bibles carefully into the cardboard box, her hands shaking a little.

"Yes, it is," Thea wondered if she had known Dad. She couldn't talk about him right now, "why are you putting these away?"

"Oh," the woman held her hand to her mouth for a few seconds, as if to stop herself from crying, "with those awful people out there so obviously targeting everything to do with the Bible, I'm not going to leave these lying around!"

Thea stopped stacking the Bibles. She looked at them, around at the church, estimating perhaps one hundred left to collect in the pews.

"What if people want to read one? With Error 404, some people might not have Bibles anymore. They might come here instead to read them."

"Oh my dear, well they will just have to work out something else. I'm going to put these in a locked cupboard. This building needs protecting. It's stood here for almost one thousand years you know!"

Thea blinked. She would never call herself a committed Christian and had given up any faith she might have had years ago but this seemed wrong. All these people running scared. Her heart sank. At the same time, she knew that as soon as she got back to the flat, she would start looking for whatever it was that Grayson wanted. She didn't have much else to do. Work could wait. After Error 404, she'd been granted compassionate circumstances, whatever she needed.

"I think you should leave them out," Thea said to the churchwarden, in as friendly a tone as she could manage, "we can't let them win."

The churchwarden gave her a look of shock and shook her head, looking down at the Bibles in her hands and then back at Thea on the verge of tears, "Whatever next?" she said, "whatever will they do next?"

Thea had always assumed that she would move out of the flat in another year or two, as soon as she had saved enough for her own place. She and Dad could not have gone on together, living reminders of what had happened, no matter how hard they had both tried to work through it.

As she made her way back through the walkways and stairwells to her tower, she remembered all the ways that Dad had tried to take her mind off Mum and Finn. The last twelve years had been crammed full of activity with every minute filled. He'd not always been around but there had always been something that he'd signed her up for. Clubs, courses, holiday camps, boot camps, bush-craft, outward-bound, focused coaching and mentoring of every kind had occupied every moment that she wasn't in school or Uni. Now at the age of twenty-three, she was proficient in skills that others in her office hadn't even heard of. She could hardly look at the sky without thinking about what the weather was about to do, or at a scrappy piece of wasteland without wondering how she'd create a shelter to spend the night there. She shook her head, remembering how important he had thought it was and how desperate she was to follow his wishes, to make up for what she had done, to cover the guilt she felt. Now that he was gone too, what was any of it for?

Thea pushed open the heavy glass door opening into the foyer of her block with its seventies decor and twenty-four-hour porterage.

"Hi Stanley," she said, relieved that some things never changed, able to tell the day of the week and the time of day by the porters on duty.

"Miss Summers. How are you doing today?"

"Yeah, I'm fine, thanks." Denial was becoming automatic.

"So, funeral yesterday?" he asked, a bit awkward.

"Hmm. Got to get on with life now, really," she said.

"Yes, well, you've got to let us know if there's anything we can… you know…"

"I will, I appreciate it, thanks."

"Er, there's something I need to ask about, though. Your visitors from earlier didn't return their key. I came on duty a couple of hours ago to find that I've got a set missing in the cupboard."

"Visitors?"

"Ah yes, er, well, let me check… he opened the well-thumbed ledger and ran his thick forefinger down the page. "Steve's shift." He said. "Ah, here it is. Flat 187. Probate."

"Probate?"

"Yes, came in at 11:33 this morning, signed out at 12:49. Should have given the keys back. Strange that Steve didn't ask for them, usually we know…"

Thea had left the flat at about ten. She frowned, knowing nothing about how any of this worked and wondering if Lara had just forgotten to tell her. Maybe this is just what happened. Everything else had been planned carefully. His funeral, the service, a will, it was all there with his solicitor. So why not probate, too? She shrugged.

"Not to worry," Stanley said, "maybe you could phone after them and see if they can pop their set back. Sometimes happens. Just make sure those come back, eh? Otherwise, we've got nothing! Presumably your Dad's keys..?" he trailed off awkwardly.

Thea said nothing, leaving him at the lobby desk and passing into the quiet, familiar lift foyer with its dimmed lighting. A lift stood ready, opening its doors as soon as she pressed the button.

The eighteenth-floor smelt as it always did, a sharp citrus cleaning chemical used daily, bags of rubbish taken like magic from outside the door. Fully serviced accommodation for modern urban living. She wondered if Hattie, their cleaner, would keep coming in on Wednesday afternoons. She should probably contact her, too. The flat was already getting a bit grubby.

As she unlocked the door with her key to let herself in, she flinched. Something was different. It was darker than usual and there was a weird smell. Thea switched on the lights and walked into the hallway that stretched the length of the flat, past the four bedrooms, leading to the living area and galley kitchen. All the curtains had been drawn and, as she looked into the closest room, her father's study, she realized that the visitors who had been here were unlikely to have been probate.

The place was wrecked.

Moving from room to room, she saw with deepening horror that every piece of furniture had been treated in the same way, torn apart, upholstery ripped and drawers pulled out and cracked, with books and papers strewn everywhere. Picture frames from the walls were taken apart and ornaments smashed, seats, cushions, and mattresses with their stuffing and foam scattered.

In the kitchen, she saw the open fridge and freezer with its contents spread across the floor.

The visitors had been looking for something. Grayson said that they might come, that they wanted Dad's documents, letters, plans, notes that could lead to something else, something to prove them wrong. Why had she not looked for them as soon as she'd got back? Another thought gripped her… had these people been watching her this morning, waiting for her to leave? This was getting creepy.

She looked at the books closest to her, splayed and damaged on the floor. Picking a couple up, she tried smoothing out the crumpled pages, closing the books, troubled by how upset Dad would have been by this. She felt increasingly numb as she drifted around the flat, not knowing what to do. Had they found what they were looking for? She picked up bits of smashed

ornaments and artifacts, trying to remember what they had been. The last place she checked was her bedroom. It was the same there.

She should phone the police.

As she tried to find a handset, her eyes were drawn to a smashed picture frame lying face-up on the floor. It was familiar to her, a pencil drawing of their ancestor Sir Edmund, pictured as a knight kneeling in front of a cross, the square cross of the Knights Hospitallers of Jerusalem. On the tabard of the knight, seen from behind, was the St George Cross, with the same symbol in each of the four corners. She knew from her Ancient Greek what it meant. The Greek letter for L, Lambda. She remembered asking him what the link between lambda and the knight was and he had smiled with a deep kind of confidence that filled him up.

"It's a sign of devotion," he said. "It shows that he has played a part in protecting the Word of God. It's something I admire deeply. Something I want to emulate in my own life."

At the time, Thea didn't know what it meant and thought he took God and all that a bit too far. Now she realized that it was this devotion that had led him to take them all into the desert to track down some ancient bit of the Sinai Codex Bible, pretending it was a holiday.

It wasn't her fault.

She remembered Grayson's words.

Your father's job was to protect the past. To safeguard the truth for the future.

Although Grayson was describing Dad's lifework, a new sadness overwhelmed her, with the understanding that he had failed in his life work. The very texts he had tried to protect from the past had been destroyed and he had never found the missing documents that he had carried on looking for. This Error 404 group, with their bombs and web viruses, creating a level of fear that made churches hide their bibles; they seemed to be

winning. Could she still get revenge on them? Did they find what they were looking for or was there still something here that could prove them wrong?

She decided not to phone the police just yet. Taking off her coat and hanging it on the back of one of the chairs, she rolled up her sleeves and looked around, assessing the situation, her hands on her hips. No point in getting the police to establish a crime scene if there was something here that the intruders hadn't found.

She searched everywhere but the more she looked, the more she despaired. Everywhere she looked had been thoroughly worked over already. Whatever Grayson had wanted her to find had either been taken or it was never here in the first place. The extent of the mess made her think that they didn't find it if they were after the same thing, which she was convinced they were.

Wouldn't it be wonderful if we could retrieve the rest of it? If we could prove to the world that these Error 404 people have not completely cut us off from the past?

Perhaps it wasn't possible. Thea walked out onto the cold, windy balcony and lowered her chin onto her arms as she lent on the pebble-dashed concrete ledge, looking down to St Giles' church on her left, where she had been this afternoon, then to her right across St Bartholomew's Hospital and over towards St Paul's Cathedral, the gray clouds growing heavier south of the London Eye. So many old buildings lay around her, with their history and secrets hidden deep within them. A faint veil of mist obscured the tower at Crystal Palace on the horizon. It would rain here too soon, she thought.

History and secrets.

Thea's heart skipped a beat. Could he have hidden information somewhere else? She thought of the knight's commemorative plaques in St Giles' church.

As she turned to step back into the living room from the balcony, she heard the doorbell ring. Standing stock-still, she felt her heart hammer in her chest. No-one ever rang the bell. If someone was visiting, the porter would

ring up first to announce them and one of them would open the door in advance.

Without making a sound, she crept to the intercom handset in the hallway, careful to stay out of sight of the peephole in the door. Lifting it, she had a direct line to Stanley downstairs. She pressed the button to alert him to come to the phone. He didn't answer.

Something was wrong.

As she tried the button again, the metallic sound of a key finding the lock grated on the other side of the front door. Who had a key?

The visitors from earlier.

Thea's instinctively ran back down the corridor onto the balcony and ducked down behind the level of the sofa so that if they came into the living room, they wouldn’t see her through the large window. Crouched on the balcony below their line of sight, she could hear their conversation as they came into the living room.

"Look again!" she heard, an aggressive voice that she didn't recognize.

"I don't know what I'm looking for, do I?" replied someone else. "I promise, we did our best earlier and there's nothing here."

"Are you kidding me? At the price you're being paid? We haven't got time to give it a second look. This was meant to be the easy part!"

Thea froze, pressing her back against the glass, looking frantically to her left where the balcony led to a long, protected walkway down the side of the building.

"What's this?" the voice in charge said, "a woman's coat."

"That wasn't here before."

"Is someone here?"

"Maybe it's the daughter, they said if we find her…"

"She's here. Spread out, find her!"

Thea felt the glass behind her move as the sliding door was opened further. She had to move, now.

Ducking down and running as fast as she could in a crouched position, she got to the corner of the balcony where she hoped to be out of sight of whoever it was coming out onto the balcony. The wind whipped at her hair and chilled her without her coat on but the adrenaline coursing through her quickly made her forget the cold. With her back against the rough concrete, she looked down the walkway to the central fire escape, a precipitous spiral staircase in the distance hugging the side of the building and winding back down the eighteen floors to ground level. It made her catch her breath, terrified.

Every single room in the flat had floor to ceiling windows and when she started down the walkway she would be seen for sure. She couldn't hear or see them from where she was now. It would take about ten seconds for her to get to the staircase. She launched herself from her position, sprinting as hard as she could, buffeted by the wind, her feet flying as though the walkway was made of hot coals. She heard shouts behind her but didn't dare to look back. She reached the fire escape and almost overshot, her momentum almost taking her over the metal railing but she turned and leaped down the first couple of stairs, clinging onto the rail as she landed, trying to get a good rhythm on the stairs as she clanged and banged her way down the steps.

She couldn't look down and yet she had to keep her balance. The fear rocketing through her brain worked overtime to make sure she placed each foot evenly, terrified of turning her ankle on the metal stairs. Voices yelled from above but she saw the open courtyard below, lit up, with people passing, hoping that someone going in or out of the shop at the base of the tower might hear.

A crack ricocheted off the steps above her. Were they shooting at her? She couldn't slow down, had to hope that they wouldn't find a direct hit. Now

she knew that whatever they wanted, it was worth killing for.

There was one more shot before she arrived at the base of the tower and pushed against the circular set of exit bars that prevented access in the opposite direction. She slipped along the side of the building and ducked into the convenience store behind the main entrance where a handful of dopey looking customers wandered up and down the short aisles, unaware of the danger above them.

Would they follow her? She eyed the door to the storage room at the back, wondering if it led to another exit, positioning herself out of sight of the main door, listening, letting her loud breathing and terrified mind die down, anticipating that any minute they might burst in and find her.

Time passed and nothing happened. Every second urged her to shout to the shopkeeper to call the police but the cash register rang up the purchases of the other shoppers and she heard the incidental chat about the weather and local road closures pass between them and nothing more happened. Smoothing down her hair to look a little less wild, Thea regretted taking her coat off up there.

There was nowhere for her to go. They knew where she lived, they had her phone, they had been ordered to find her. A large group of tourists suddenly filled the shop and a commanding voice made her jump, "Only ten minutes before the concert begins so let's be as quick as we can, please!"

She took the opportunity. Seconds later, she was heading back towards St Giles' church, Cripplegate, safe inside the concert-going crowd, hidden by their umbrellas as they made their way across the courtyard to the church just in time for the 7.30 pm Saturday evening concert to start.

Chapter 5 Day 9, St Giles’ Cripplegate

Inside the warm ancient building, Thea felt her heartbeat slow a little but she was still riven with anxiety as she tried to control her breathing and blend in with the concert-goers. The low buzz of conversation silenced itself as soon as the orchestra began tuning up and the last few members of

the audience took their places in the pews, now empty of Bibles. She made her way to the far side, down the side aisles where there were a few empty seats, out of sight of the main door. She thought she would sit for a while getting her breath back before going to look at Edmund's memorial plaques and testing a theory that had been growing in her mind.

"Can I help you?" a gentle voice beside her made her jump. Another *Friend of St Giles* , this one with a sharp smile and piercing blue eyes.

"We do have to make sure that everyone in here tonight has a ticket," she whispered, prompting a few people around them to turn around.

Thea winced, "Oh," she said with an apologetic smile, matching the woman's quiet tone, "I hadn't realized that there would be a concert on tonight. I'm here to look at something for my family timeline. You know, researching my ancestors?"

The woman smiled conspiratorially. "Well, I would very much like to believe you, my dear…"

"Please, I just want to look at some plaques at the back, there's a couple about s knight..."

The woman put her finger to her lips and Thea realized that she had been talking rather than whispering and that the row in front of her was beginning to shift with irritation. She nodded her head towards the back of the church and Thea got up to follow her, stopping at the base of the back wall where hundreds of plaques stretched above them.

"I've been part of this church for fifteen years," the Friend said, still in a whisper, "and I'd like to think I know most of the names on these walls. Tell me, who are you looking for?"

"Sir Edmund Somers," Thea breathed quietly, still glancing now and then at the door, in case her pursuers had followed her here, "he was a knight, around 1540?"

The orchestral music was building to a crescendo and the Friend patted her arm, no longer concerned. "I know the one," she said with a smile, "take your time". She turned back to take her chair by a stone column while bright, smug melodies in a new, major key leaped and danced around the building.

Thea had seen the plaques before but couldn't locate them straight away. Her eyes scanned across the dates until she remembered that the brass rectangles were nearer the floor, tucked into a corner. There they were, three of them, screwed into the stone, so dark with tarnish that they were virtually illegible. They had the date on them: 1540, and the name Edmundus Somers, together with the word 'miles'. Thea had chosen Latin instead of German at school so that she and Dad could work on it together. That was the theory anyway. When revision time came along, he had always been away, as usual. She'd been left alone with teachers and holiday tutors to get on with it. Teemed with Ancient Greek at Uni, her Latin was now good enough to read the whole plaque without any difficulty. Edmund's name had also been converted to Latin in the tradition of the time. The text was also surrounded by random indentations.

"You found what you were looking for?" a sharp whisper with an over-dramatic smile caught her by surprise. The Friend was right at her shoulder again.

"Yes, thanks," Thea replied cheerfully, trying not to give her nerves away, trying to nod reassuringly as the woman returned to her seat again.

Thea ducked down behind the tomb and searched the brass plaques for the clues that she was looking for. As she did so, she realized that the indentations she had noticed earlier were not as random as she had thought. They were tiny lambda symbols like the ones in the corners of the drawing of the knight back in the flat. *Protecting the word of God.*

The other two brass plaques commemorating the knight had no more text on them. On one was a coat of arms and on the other, a simple cross. Her legs, squashed into an unnatural position while she looked, began to ache, so she stood up to stretch them. That was when she noticed something about the plaque with the cross on it that she thought might support her theory.

From this angle, its corners looked different, lighter somehow. Despite the complaints from her ankles, she crouched down again and, looking closer, realized there was something odd about the screws holding the plaque onto the wall. The crossbars of the screw-heads were not ingrained with ancient dirt like the other two. They had tiny scratches through and around them, as though someone had recently been at them with a screwdriver. She touched her finger to them. They weren't flush against the brass like the others were. The plaque had been taken off the wall for some reason. Could it be for the reason she suspected? She hooked her fingernail behind it to test how firmly it was attached to the wall and gave it a little tug. As she had expected, it lifted off easily, the screws pulling away a few grains of dry mortar from the crumbling material behind it. There was a hole there and there was something in it. Terrified of drawing attention, she pushed it back onto the wall as she wondered what to do next. It held.

The church erupted into applause. The first piece was over. Thea stood up to ease the pains in her legs and saw that although every head was turned away from her, the Friend had swiveled around at that moment to catch her eye. Thea smiled brightly and turned back, using the time while the woman was watching her translate the words.

Sepultus in insula Melia pugnatum Preveza vitae cultum Deo gratias.

Buried on the island of Melia, having fought at Preveza. Giving his life in the service of God.

The orchestra began tuning up again and there was a flurry of activity as everyone returned to their seats.

"Those are lovely memorials, dear." The Friend whispered, appearing next to her, making Thea jump.

"Thanks," smiled Thea. "I'm enjoying looking at them. The music is very soothing."

"I'll be over there if you need me," she said and turned away.

Thea took a deep breath. This was her moment but she had to do it quickly. The tomb hid her from sight as she got her fingernails around the back of the brass and tugged, pulling it away from the wall.

Behind the plaque was a cubbyhole containing something wrapped in a cloth. Thea reached in and pulled it out, making as little noise as possible. The cloth contained an A5 notebook. Her heart jumped. It was the type that her father always used. Dark brown leather covering the creamy white paper with an elastic loop to keep them shut. This must be it, the information that everyone was after. He had kept it safe somewhere no-one would look. Apart from her.

"What do you think you're doing?" the Friend suddenly materialised behind her, bristling.

"Sorry," Thea mumbled, wanting to get out, hoping that this woman wouldn't make a big fuss in the middle of the concert. Her cheeks burned nevertheless. She stood up with an apologetic grimace, put her head down and pushed past the Friend, through the exit, escaping into the fresh night air. Once the door closed behind her, she ran as fast as she could into the dark shadows beyond the reach of the exterior lights illuminating the church. No-one followed her.

She could see her flat from this angle, the curtains still closed, the lights still on behind them. They must have assumed that she wasn't worth following. Even now they must still be pulling the place apart, looking for this book, the information that Dad had hidden so carefully, that only she knew to find.

She mentally worked out a route through the Barbican complex to get away and hide. It was getting late. Almost nine. Where would she go for the night?

Thea ducked into a passageway and came out into a brightly-lit tunnel. It was the main road that ran under the arts center, full of cars, taxis and buses. Feeling vulnerable here, she decided to get through to the estate on the other side, where a maze of residential streets would quickly hide her, where she could think.

A siren blared out further on down the road which made her jump. She dodged behind a wall and found herself next to a group of large industrial metal refuse bins. The noise of her heavy breathing shocked her as she crouched down and crammed herself into a corner so that she couldn't be seen from the road.

The cold ate through her thin shirt but she was shivering from excitement, too. This book that she was holding; was this really what everyone was trying to find? She undid the elastic and flicked through it, trying to suppress an upwelling of emotion at her father's familiar handwriting. In the ambient light from the streetlights, she turned page after page filled with sketches and densely written notes. Wanting a better look, she moved warily into a new position just away from the bins so that the light fell directly on the pages. The journal, almost completed, stretched from about five months ago to the present day. There were sketches of buildings, caves, ships, with arrows and annotations alongside scribbled times and dates.

The latest entry was from only a few months ago. *Monday, January 18th 20_ Alboran Island*

Had Dad really been away then? Thea realized that she had never had much of an idea of whether he was in the country or out of it. Despite living in the same flat, they might as well have lived apart for all they knew about each other. Regret gnawed at her. Maybe his job hadn't been so boring after all.

Went to the island alone today despite interest from S. Initial search reveals no SC pages anywhere. Cemetery looks C17th. No artifacts. Mess from refugees everywhere. Climate disastrous.

Thea sighed. It didn't make much sense.

ES grave?? Recheck symbolic refs.

She looked at another page to find the word Ezekiel mentioned several times. Thea was relieved, this was the information that Grayson had asked for. Flicking back to the front cover, she realized that there was something else. A key taped to the inside. Pulling gently at the tape to free it, she picked it up and turned it over in her hand, trying to work out what it was

for. It was different from the one she had for the flat, smaller, more like a key for a locker, though there was no indication as to where that locker might be. There was a four-digit number etched onto it. She shook her head. Perhaps she should go straight to Cambridge. Grayson would help her to contact the police and work out what she should do next. Maybe she would even get in contact with Aunt Lara, go and stay in Norfolk for a while. That option suddenly seemed quite appealing. She thought about work. With only a week to go before the Easter Bank Holiday, the office wouldn't even notice that she wasn't there. Since Dad had died, she had blanked them all. She had been in to collect some stuff from her desk but none of them had become her friends. It wasn't a job she intended to stay at. Like all the others she had tried, it was just a way of getting through the week, the month, the year. The idea of returning to that sort of reality did not appeal to her.

She thought back to Uni where making friends had not been her chosen subject either. Her courses in Classical Civilisation, Greek, Latin, and Ancient History had been chosen to please Dad but none of that seemed to matter anymore.

Work could wait. Now, the most important thing was that Dad's journal was safe with Grayson.

She still had her Travelcard in its pouch in her jeans pocket from her trip to the counselor. When she pulled it out to check, she was relieved to see that there were a couple of notes tucked in there too. Enough to get her to Cambridge.

Thea jogged through the back streets, heading for Liverpool Street Station, avoiding eye contact with anyone, ducking her head when she passed CCTV cameras. When she had bought her ticket from the concourse machines and checked the departure board, she allowed herself to relax a little. A train was leaving in twelve minutes.

As she headed for the platform, she passed a sign to the station lockers. Surely not, could it be that simple? Following the direction of the arrow, she saw the banks of tall rectangles with their tiny keyholes. They had four-digit numbers. It was the work of under a minute to find the one that

corresponded to her key, to fit it in, to feel the lock give and turn, the metal door opening to reveal a small black rucksack. She reached in and grabbed it. Swinging it onto her back like it was nothing out of the ordinary she jogged off to catch her train.

She found a near-empty carriage and sat next to a heater, pulling the rucksack onto her lap and hugging it, holding her reddened hands to the warmth, flushed with a sense of jubilation at having worked something out, of feeling like she might be in control of what was happening to her. She breathed deeply. She knew what this rucksack was. It was her Dad's *Just In Case* bag. He had often urged her to have one in her cupboard but she'd never put one together. Once her fingers had thawed out, she would find out what he had packed and then read through the whole journal from cover to cover. Part of her thought it would remind her of his voice. The other part wanted to find out what he had been up to all these years.

Chapter 6 Day 10, Cambridge

Thea shivered, head bent and arms crossed over the rucksack worn across her chest, annoyed once more at her lack of coat as she walked through a thin drizzle away from Cambridge station but glad again that she had followed her Dad's trail so successfully. The sack contained six different passports, three for each of them with different names, money in various denominations, particularly US dollars, Euros and Egyptian currency. There was a basic phone still in its box in an unopened cellophane wrapping, a basic first aid kit, a Swiss penknife, a brand-new water filter drinking straw and an emergency blanket.

Thea's main concern now was whether Grayson meant what he said, that he would be at the Faculty of Divinity, even now, late on a Saturday night. If he wasn't, she didn't know what she would do. Looking over her shoulder, she was pretty sure that she wasn't being followed but she didn't want to draw attention to herself. She felt a bit out of place, vulnerable and cold.

Back at the station, there was a map of the city that she had used to memorize a route to the Faculty, making it easier to thread her way along the route. Sure enough, it took her about twenty minutes until she got to the

front of a tall glass column of a building with a sign outside identifying it as the Faculty of Divinity building. Even in the dark, it looked tired, the metal struts bleeding orangey rust, the window frames looking steel-rimmed and ineffective against the cold. It was the sort of architecture that might have looked good in the sixties. Not now.

No lights were on inside and the door was locked. She cupped her free hand around her eyes and peered through the window to see a reception desk lit by a dim green exit light. There were notices taped to the door, tatty and dog-eared. One of them mentioned a security number to contact in emergencies and another gave instructions in angry capitals about not bringing food into the foyer.

No sign of Grayson.

Thea started to shiver and her panic returned. Would she have to spend the night outside? She thought of the emergency blanket. It wouldn't be too bad…

Determined to keep moving, she began walking around the perimeter of the building and realized that there was more to it than the steel and glass cylinder at the front. Passing bike racks, a few straggly bushes and a couple of bins, she kept the building to her right until she found herself at the back of the complex, by a wall with trees on the other side. If there was a garden, she thought, there must be sheds, somewhere she could use as a shelter until the morning. She was desperate to be warm again.

The wall, although old, looked fairly solid, only a couple of meters high. She came to a section that looked more weathered and rough, with indentations in the uneven brickwork. Thea began to climb, gripping the stone with her cold fingers. Although it was a little slippery, she found good footholds and was soon grabbing for the topmost bricks and swinging her body up to lie flat along it. From this point she could see down into a garden leading up to the rear of the Faculty; a large patch of grass, rimmed with trees and flowerbeds. On the left-hand side, she could make out smallish structures in the darkness that could be sheds. Letting herself drop down onto the ground on the other side of the wall, she silently picked her way around the edge.

When she got to the first shed it was locked and there were no windows and she felt like crying with frustration. She tipped her head to look at the sky but the low clouds reflected the city's glow and there were no stars. Glancing back over at the main building, she saw a light in one of the second-floor windows.

A shadow moved against the blind. Someone was there. Was it Grayson?

Only one way to find out, she thought, deciding to act first and explain herself later. She moved out onto the grass below the window and picked a couple of stones from the gravel on the path. Old ways are the best, she thought. The very first stone hit the window with a crack. Thea ducked instinctively, expecting the bushes and trees around her to erupt with night-time security. It didn't but the blind was pulled up, a window opened and a shadowy head poked out.

'Thea?' Grayson's wavering voice was unmistakeable, 'you've found it?'

'Let me in,' she said, 'I'm freezing.'

'Give me a moment.'

A couple of minutes later, a door opened a couple of meters away from where she was standing with a large silhouette outlined against the light within. Thea pulled the journal from her rucksack as she passed inside, trying not to give away how glad she was to see a face she recognized and to be with someone her father trusted. She had no choice now but to trust him too.

'Is it what I think it is?' Grayson asked, shutting the door behind her, the delight evident in his voice, 'did you find his notes?'

Thea paused, 'I found this journal. I think it's important.'

'Marvellous. Let's have a closer look at it in my office.'

Grayson led Thea up a flight of stairs and along a corridor, both of which were as tired and dated as the rest of the building. She wondered what the

students made of studying at this prestigious university where their high fees didn't touch the fabric of their surroundings. She assumed that the brains within it were world-class, second to none. Maybe they were so cerebral that they never noticed.

'It's a dump, isn't it?' asked Grayson light-heartedly, reading her thoughts.

She followed him through a corridor that lit up as they reached the top of the stairs.

'This is me,' he said, gesturing at an open door a little way down the corridor, through which Thea could see a desk lamp at a table covered with books, papers, and manuscripts, looking very like Dad's office in the British Library. In the center of the chaos on the desk, she saw a cleared space with a wing-shaped document in the middle, browned with age and tatty around the edges. As she moved closer, she saw that the script on the wing was identical to the Codex that her father had devoted his life to.

'Greek Uncial?' she asked.

'Yes!' Grayson laughed, seeming surprised at her knowledge 'Can you date it too?'

'Fourth century?' she knew the date of the Sinai Codex. Perhaps this was a part of it.

'Actually, this fragment has been dated to a couple of centuries earlier. Possibly even as early as the second century. It's from a collection called the Chester Beatty papyrus, kept in Ireland. It was discovered folded up and shoved in a jar on a bishop's tomb on the banks of the Nile in 1931.'

'The original?' Thea asked, puzzled by its presence here, knowing the precautions taken by Dad over his manuscripts.

'Er, yes, a small part of it… but we don't need to talk about that right now,' Grayson said, pausing, then sitting down heavily on the chair at the desk and gesturing to a comfortable-looking armchair with a blanket thrown over

it. Thea sat down, gratefully pulling the blanket around her shoulders, deeply relieved to feel a little bit of warmth again.

'So, let's have a look at this journal…"

Thea's attention was diverted by a noise outside. She went to the window but the garden below her was a dark pool of night. Grayson was still talking.

'Until that day when Error 404 blew everything up, we had so much to work from for our modern translations of the Bible. Now there is barely anything.' He looked around at the wing-shaped parchment on his desk, 'the destruction of those texts makes this one so much more valuable. If I hadn't, er, requested it and brought it here to study, it would have gone too. Imagine if we could also find a part of the Sinai Codex that has been missing until now! Gradually, we could rebuild the trust, the historical link with the past…'

Thea thought of the people who had broken into her flat. They seemed organized, equipped, part of a very powerful plan. Suddenly she doubted that this old Professor could help her after all. What was she thinking, coming here, wanting protection from an old man? She went back to the side of the window and lowered the blinds.

'Dad hid that journal well,' she said, thinking of the knight's picture in the flat, the plaques in the church, her risky move to get hold of it, 'they came to the flat, twice, the second time while I was there. They knew I was there but I got away even though they chased me, they *shot* at me, but I found the journal, came here.'

Grayson shook his head with admiration, 'He would be so amazed at you,' said Grayson, "your courage, your ingenuity."

"Yeah," said Thea, "well, what am I supposed to do now? I can't go back to London…"

"I'll help you work it out. I'm sure it's not as bad as you think. He reached into the inside pocket of his old tweed jacket hanging on the back of the

door and pulled out a bundle of notes. "Here," he said, "this will help you to disappear for a while."

"There must be at least five hundred pounds here!" Thea gasped.

'You'll probably need more than that. I'll give you some addresses. Places they'll never find you.'

Thea smiled, grateful. Maybe he could help her after all. She was right to come.

'Come on, let's look more closely at this journal shall we?" he said, pulling out a tiny drawer hidden in the moldings set into the top of his desk. From the drawer, he took a light purple piece of perspex, about the size of an A5 page. He placed it on top of the inside cover of the journal which Thea had thought was blank. Now showing through the perspex, in the corner of the page, Thea saw a tiny symbol that made her heart clench. The lambda.

"What exactly does that mean?" she asked quietly, pointing to it, "is it a secret symbol, something about protecting the Bible?"

"Where have you seen it before?"

"it was a picture and on the… the place where I found the journal.'

Grayson paused and scratched his beard. 'Does the word Logos mean anything to you?'

Thea frowned. That was it, the word that Brian had asked her about at the funeral. A group called the Logos.

'I've heard it once before.'

'It is a Greek word meaning 'the word', you know, like the word of God? The ancient Greeks used it to identify a body of information, we get the word 'logic' from it, meaning a complete and satisfactory argument or the final word to be declared on something.'

'So it's not a group of people.'

Grayson smiled at her. 'It's a group of people alright. Your Dad was one of them…' he trailed off wistfully. 'Right, let's have a look at this.'

As he used the perspex over different pages, it became clear that some had additional information that wasn't revealed before. Maps and line drawings, scribbles.

'So, he was right,' Grayson said finally. 'Alboran.'

'Sorry?' said Thea.

'You've heard of Melilla?'

Thea remembered the words in Latin on Somers' memorial plaque. *Buried on the island of Melilla, having fought at Preveza. Giving his life in the service of God.*

'Yes?' she said tentatively.

'Well, Alboran is near there. Fifty kilometers or so North of the Spanish enclave of Melilla, bordering Morocco. A tiny island named after a battle fought there in 1540 between the corsair pirate Ali Hamet and the Spaniard Bernadino de Mendoza. It seems as though something was buried there a long time ago.'

He looked at her with urgency. 'The missing part of the Sinai Codex may be out there. We can find it.'

She smiled, remembering how she'd thought him a little insane when he'd talked like this at the funeral.

'So you'll go there to look?'

He nodded, a slow smile filling his face for the first time.

Thea sank into a worn leather chair on the opposite side of the small office, tired and relieved. She watched as he flipped through the journal, occasionally putting the purple perspex over a page, smiling a small smile to himself and giving the occasional gasp. Her mind drifted from the journal

as her responsibility lifted. She felt that her job was done. She was glad to be safe.

'I want to put you in touch with someone.' Grayson said, 'if you run into any problems when I'm gone, he'll be able to help you. His name's Simon Derridge. He works for the Home Office and you can trust him. I'm letting him know about my plans about you right now.'

Grayson tapped away at his computer and she heard the ping and whoosh of emails being sent and received.

As she sat there, eyes glazing over, she saw the door move slightly. It made her suddenly alert. A breeze? The windows were shut.

Then she saw it. A dark grey metallic tube, pointing straight at the Professor's back. Thea tried to catch Grayson's attention but two bursts of softened fire beat her to it and the Professor keeled over, landing first on the desk and then sliding off it, pulling the journal, the perspex and other papers and maps with him as he collapsed onto the floor.

Thea's legs buckled as she saw a large figure sidle around the door, gun up, ready to fire again.

'Hello, Thea.'

Brian Truman? The security guard?

'What have you done?' she said.

'Sorry' he said, as though he had eaten her sandwich by mistake, 'no choice.'

Putting this together made no sense, this security guard, this old friend of Dad's? Thea felt paralyzed as she watched him turn his back on her, engrossed in the parchment on the desk.

'Any idea what this is? It looks old. Not having that,' he picked it up and before she could say anything, he had scrunched it up like a tissue. 'That's better.' He opened his fists and tiny fragments drifted to the floor, pale and now inconsequential.

'Who are you working for?' Thea whispered.

'I think they are calling us Error 404.'

'So…the British Library…my Dad?' she asked quietly, not wanting to hear the answer, 'you were part of it?'

'Yes. But let's move on - we need to think about you now. Your Dad had a lead to more of this crap. That's why I was at the funeral, to see if anyone knew anything. After I heard you talking about it with the professor, I followed him back here to Cambridge. Been waiting a couple of days for an opportunity to find out more and then you come along and out it all comes! All that chat about the Logos you just had. This Grayson bloke knew all about it, didn't he? Sounds like they've found more manuscripts, Alboran was it?'

Thea was still putting it all together, 'You're part of Error 404?'

'Yes,' he sighed, 'keep up.'

'You want to destroy *more* manuscripts? You're not happy with what you've done already?'

'Well the job's not done until there's nothing left,' he said cheerfully, 'we're cutting off all links to the past, freeing humanity from religion, you know the sort of thing.'

Thea's head span, confused at the ridiculous contrast of Brian's cheerful chatter with the horror of Grayson's body lying there on the floor, a tiny brown corner of the journal sticking out from under his shoulder. Her eyes watered at the sight in front of her, the pool of blood growing out of him. She tried to make herself look back at Brian, in case she gave away where the journal was but it was too late.

'Ah!' his eyes lit up as he hauled Grayson to one side and picked up the little treasure, flicking through it eagerly. 'All Logos intelligence, this, isn't it?' he asked, 'They're going to love this!'

'Who are they?'

'Oh, my superiors,' postured Brain, 'the ones who sent me.'

'It's just an old diary, it doesn't mean anything.'

'We'll find out what this is about. We've got the best minds in the world working for us. They'll soon work out what your Dad was after. What the Logos was trying to protect. And then we'll find it and get rid of it like it never existed.'

"Does Morrie know what you're doing?" Thea asked, feeling a cold calm descend on her, wanting to hurt him, make him suffer.

"No, not my daft old bird," Brian replied softly.

Thea saw a moment of weakness. "Why are you doing this to her?" she said, "that poor woman deserves more than this."

"I'm *doing* this for her!" Brian said with a short laugh, pointing an aggressive finger at her, "so don't lay the guilt on me. You have no idea what we've been through! My pension fund… thirty-five years of graft it was. I paid into it all that time, thinking I was going to get a great return, ready for us to retire all nice and comfortable. Then just a year ago, I find out that the final sum is half what I expected. The investments they were making included funding stupid arts projects like looking after the Sinai Codex at the British Library. I found that out when Error 404 contacted me and put me in the picture. They set me up with that security job, told me what to do. Gave me back the money I lost, and some...' He smiled, then turned and looked at the back of the door where Grayson's bag hung. He moved over to it, 'Morrie and me, we're going to have that retirement we planned after all. Now, what's the old man got in here…'

Thea stood up behind him, reached for the heavy-looking glass paperweight that lay on the floor beside Grayson's body and hit it hard against the back of Brian's head. He reeled for a moment, making her wonder if he was going to survive it, then crumpled heavily to the floor, panting, before closing his eyes.

She stayed long enough to check that he was still alive, took the journal from his hand, grabbed the purple perspex sheet and shoved them into her rucksack. Then she took Grayson's rain jacket and flat cap from the hook on the back of the door and raced off down the stairs, back the way she'd come into the garden and over the wall. She needed to put as much distance between her and the scene in Grayson's office as possible. They would be after her for this, now. Not just Error 404 but the police, too. Her thoughts tumbled over each other as she tried to make a plan. She would head for the place that her father had wanted to return to, that held a promise of finding something that had been lost.

Alboran Island.

Chapter 7 Day 11, Melilla

Sitting in an economy seat watching the grey tarmac and dark scrub of the Essex airport fade into the distance, Thea felt like she could breathe again. At Malaga, she would catch a flight to the Spanish enclave of Melilla in Northern Morocco. After that, she would try and find a boat to take her to Alboran.

It had been risky, the whole thing. Dad's *Just In Case* bag had made it possible. The money had got her a taxi to Stansted and she had bought a cheap plane ticket under the name of one of the aliases chosen from the fake passports. She tried to change the way she, now Jennifer Calder, looked, but her options were limited. The Professor's raincoat and flat cap had to do for now.

Most importantly, she needed to spend more time studying the journal. She wondered if it contained information about how to contact other members of the Logos. So far she had found very little in the book apart from information about the island and questions about this missing part of the Sinai Codex that her father believed could be found there. There seemed to be an uninhabited lighthouse on the island which she thought she could stay in for a few nights. Getting there without any sailing knowledge was going to be more tricky. She was going to have to rely on a contact whose name was mentioned in the notes from when Dad was here last, in January. A man

called Sadiq, who could be found at a restaurant on the marina promenade called the Francisco Franco.

As the seat belt signs pinged off, the crew began to move down the aisle with drinks and Thea looked out of the window. She couldn't remember when she had last been on a plane. She realized with a shudder that it was probably the flight on the way back from Egypt when she was eleven, sitting in a post-traumatic state next to her grandmother who had flown out to bring her home. Her father had stayed behind to 'make arrangements' for her mother and Finn to come back in boxes. The guilt and painful memories began to return to her. Finn, who took her practical joking seriously and walked out into the desert alone and never came back. Mum, who ran into the storm to find him, overcome by the beating sand. And now Dad. The panic rose and she used the breathing techniques that one of the therapists had taught her. Those counseling sessions seemed a long time ago now. If they could see her now…

If anything, she told herself, following Dad's trail instructions like this brought her closer to him. She was finishing his work. It made her feel less lost, less terrified like he was with her after all.

In Malaga, the hour stop-over passed quickly. She took a few minutes in the outdoor viewing area to smell the sea air and feel the warm sun on her face before returning to the next gate and boarding the plane over the Mediterranean to Melilla. The flight path took them over Alboran Island and she craned her neck, trying to see past the wing of the plane. The clouds passed below her in fluffy layers and the wrinkled metal of the sea crawled, threaded with white tracks of boats and ships as they navigated the great expanse between Europe and Africa. A speck of land came into sight in the middle of it all, looking like an accidental pebble dropped in a paddling pool. Was that it? Thea blinked in dismay. She couldn't tell.

The plane began its descent into Melilla. From her birds' eye view, she could see the clear difference between Morocco and Spain, knowing by now from the in-flight magazine that a heavily fortified wall separated the Spanish enclave from the rest of Africa. There was an obvious and desperate difference between rich and poor. Golf courses, tennis courts, and

swimming pools in neat neighborhoods on one side contrasted with dusty, sprawling dwellings among red earth roads on the other.

"All those over there, want to be in there," said a man with a strong Spanish accent, sitting next to her and pointing, saying what she was thinking.

Thea looked at him, "You live there?" she asked.

"Oh no," the Spaniard said, "not on your life. Going for the diving. Best place for it this time of year. Cheap, too."

Thea gripped the armrests.

"You don't like flying?"

Thea gripped harder and shook her head. "Brings back bad memories," she said.

In customs, they couldn't understand why she had a one-way ticket.

"I'm traveling. Gap year? Within the European Union?" she said. Reluctantly they let her go and she passed through customs into the burning heat of the African day. She looked at a map on the wall of the airport and realized with relief that Melilla was a small city and that it was a short walk to the marina.

The Francisco Franco turned out to be more of a wine bar than a restaurant, set between an Irish pub and a McDonald's. It didn't feel very authentic. Thea had imagined a smugglers' dive, hewn out of the rock, its winding steps leading down into a cave-like interior where shady characters nursed their tankards of rum. Instead, it was a boxy structure with lots of steel and glass, efficient service and a ton of air conditioning units.

"How many?" asked the matronly receptionist, dark-haired despite her wrinkles. Thea looked behind her, then realized she was talking to her. "Just me. I mean, I'm not here to have a drink. Sorry. I'm looking for someone."

"Would you like to sit down at a table while you wait for them to arrive?"

"No, I'm not, that is…" she frowned. 'I'm looking for someone who works on a boat. Someone who might know something about Alboran?"

"Alboran Island?"

"Yes."

"Are you a diver?" she asked.

"No."

"Oh. No-one goes to Alboran unless they're diving."

"I'm not a diver. I just…" how could she put it without giving too much away? "I thought there might be someone here who could help me, that's all."

"A boat, you say? Someone who works on a boat?"

"Yes, I think so."

"Okay, well, maybe my nephew can help. Hey! Alejandro!" she strode into the kitchen and shouted some more before returning, followed by a nervous young lad with a wet apron. "Alejandro, ¿Quién trabaja en un barco aquí? Dile a este hermanae!"

The boy came over and the hostess pointed to Thea and shrugged, returning to wiping tables in the absence of any customers. Thea turned to a table and gestured for the boy to sit down opposite her.

"You work on the boats in the marina?" she asked.

The boy nodded.

"I'm looking for a boat that has been to Alboran. To look around there."

"You want to go diving?" asked Alejandro, "I have a boat for you. We can go tomorrow!"

"No," Thea said, "That's not what I meant. Have you heard anyone say that they have been to the island, wanting to find something interesting?"

"You meant like treasure? Hidden?" the boy's eyes widened and his arms floated up to his head in amazement, "you want to go find treasure? Oh, I will help you, this is no problem! Maybe if I come too I can also get percentage?"

Thea kicked herself. This was far more information than she meant to give. She didn't want a get-rich-quick kid chasing around this. She had a thought. It was risky but it was better than this.

"You live here?" she asked, "in Melilla?"

"Of course."

"You know others who travel to Alboran? To take tourists, who dive?"

"Yes, but I am telling you that I can arrange this for you, it is not necessary to ask others!"

"Please," insisted Thea, "could you tell them that Mr. Henry Summers has returned and wishes to go to Alboran. He can be contacted at the Plaza hotel."

The boy frowned at her, "What is in this for me? Why should I give your business to others?"

The woman on reception came over. "When will this boy get back to work?" she asked, hands on hips.

"This woman is saying she is with Mr. Henry Summers," said Alejandro.

"Henry Summers? But I thought…" The woman narrowed her eyes at him, "What *is* your name?"

Keep it simple, Thea told herself. "Jen Calder," she said hesitantly, "you know Henry?"

"Perhaps. Now leave." Her look could not have been more suspicious. She looked Thea up and down.

"I just need to get a message to whoever he worked with on Alboran Island," Thea said, fishing for some response, someone who could help her.

"We are a restaurant, not Facebook," she growled, "go!"

She left, irritated, walking back out to the marina promenade in the glare of the afternoon sun. Sitting on a bench, she stared at the messy little speedboats that bobbed in front of her, their buoys covered in green algae, slapping against the water and their wires pinging in the cool breeze that came off the harbor. One much larger yacht had moored beyond them, on a pontoon reaching deeper water. Men dressed in white boiler suits pushed trolleys and crates down the rattling walkways towards it, delivering supplies and returning like streams of ants to collect more.

The air cooled a little as the shadows began to stretch into the afternoon. Thea could see Melilla fortress up beyond the boats. It sat on its hilltop like a squat, angular bug, its walls zigzagging crazily, punctuated with cylindrical turrets, tense and ready for action. She had read that it was built in the late fifteenth century by the Spanish to resist the spread of the Ottoman Empire, emphasizing the might of the North against the threat from the East that had migrated through Northern Africa to prepare the attack on Southern Spain ready to infiltrate Europe.

Thea thought of her ancestor, Edmund Somers. Her father's entry in the journal that had given details about his most recent trip during January.

Third search for SC pages… Need more clues from Somers…

It had made sense, she supposed, choosing the knight's plaque in the church to hide the journals. That moment when she found them seemed so long ago now. It was only the day before yesterday. So much had happened.

Dad. Grayson. Truman.

Dad.

The harbor blurred. She tried to pull herself together by thinking about that woman at the wine bar. She had recognized Dad's name. Thea felt confident that she had unsettled her, that the message would get passed on.

They would come to her. Perhaps there was already a message at the Plaza hotel? She resisted the desire to check. Maybe she should pass the time by looking around the fortress.

As she walked up the hill, she thought about her family legend. As an English Knight, on a pilgrimage to the East, why had Edmund ended up here? Thea's history of the sixteenth century was limited. She was familiar with more ancient times. Romans, maybe Visigoths, Vandals.

The fortress held no real interest for her until she found the caves beneath it. A tunnel, beautifully restored, led from the upper levels down to the sea below. She imagined smugglers, intruders, kings even, using the route to avoid prying eyes. Information signs indicated that the caves would have been in use when the city was under siege from Roman times.

Although she was meant to be down here with a tour guide, the guy on duty at the top had waved her down, insisting that she could visit on her own. There weren't many visitors this time of year, he said. Thea ran her hand over the smooth sandstone, considering the centuries that had passed. Her fingers explored graffiti carved into the honey yellow contours, names, images, dates, people down the ages, all making their eternal mark.

She returned to ask if there was a certain area of the cave that would have been used in the sixteenth century, maybe some graffiti that could be seen? She privately wondered if Edmund Somers had been here, fantasizing that she might even have left his name here too.

"These caves are old, yes? They are part of heritage for long time. No graffiti, please."

She returned down the main tunnel. Suddenly the lights flickered and switched from full glare to dim emergency lighting. Then even that went and there was nothing. She couldn't even see her hand in front of her face. There were footsteps behind her, she pressed herself against a wall and

crouched down, fearful. A rough hand grabbed her shoulder and hauled her up.

"You know Mr. Henry Summers?"

Thea's heart leaped, beating hard, "You got the message?" she croaked.

"Mr. Summers is dead. You leave Melilla. Stop looking around. Stop asking questions."

"Henry was my father," Thea said, into darkness, "you're right, he is dead. I am Henry's daughter. My name is Thea. I need to go to Alboran."

"Not Jen Calder?"

"No."

There was a pause, then something was held to her face, a sharp smell, then fuzzy darkness.

Thea woke to bright sunlight and a headache that she could not believe. Her face throbbed violently. Resisting her instincts to keep her eyes closed, she saw that she was in a small bedroom. It was empty apart from a bucket and the simple bed that she lay on. After another ten minutes or so, she managed to sit up and investigate her surroundings. The door was locked. She banged on the door, holding her head again as the sound reverberated within it.

When the door opened, she was sitting back on the bed and an intimidating man with a full beard came into view. He wore jeans and a white cotton shirt, with mirror shades and cowboy boots. Taking off his sunglasses, he looked at Thea, who stood up, wondering what would happen next.

"We were not expecting you," he said, polishing them on a handkerchief.

Thea said nothing.

"Henry talked of you a great deal. He was proud of his daughter. We think we believe that you are who you say you are. I'm sorry about," he paused,

"our precautions…" The dark eyes flashed before he turned and invited her to step out into the rest of the house.

Thea smiled weakly, flooded with relief, "Have you got any painkillers?" she asked feebly. When he nodded, she thought she'd try to get what she needed, "and will you take me to Alboran?" she added.

"My cousin Sadiq will take you there tomorrow, together with my nephew, Alejandro. I think you met him at the restaurant. He has a boat and he will take you there. Before then, Mariam will show you where you can stay. Be careful. What you are about to do will draw enemies. Your father Henry Summers took every precaution. He meant a great deal to us and we will try to explain why that is. In the meantime, you are welcome because of him but more because of your ancestor, Edmund."

Chapter 8 1538, Musa

"To Sir Edmund Somers. The legendary knight of England." Sadiq said with a broad smile, raising his glass.

Thea was still bewildered. Sitting here in the Francisco Franco after closing time, she still had no idea how they knew about Edmund or why he was important to them. They wanted to help her because of him, that much she understood.

"We have a family history too, going back hundreds of years to when our ancestor, Musa, came to settle here in Melilla. He was a soldier, working in the service of the Ottoman Empire, fighting in battles against the Spanish, the Europeans. Musa made a friend, a prisoner who he was responsible for, one who he chose to set free as tradition allowed. He traveled with this prisoner on pilgrimage to Sinai in Egypt and then they came here. That prisoner was Edmund."

"But how did my father come to know you?" Thea puzzled, "what linked you up with him?"

She couldn't help but notice the quick look that passed between Mariam and Sadiq. It was a look of shame mixed with triumph. Mariam gave a little nod and Sadiq continued. "We were facing financial difficulties," he confessed, "this place, the Franco, was in great debt. Too many taxes and not enough visitors. We had always preserved Musa's diary as a family treasure, but the time had come, we thought, to find out what its financial value was. We guessed that there might be someone willing to pay a lot of money for a firsthand account of his experiences. A Muslim Ottoman and a Christian Knight! What a story is there. A historian perhaps might want to investigate it, or a religious expert, looking for a great example of friendship across the religious divide? So we put it up for auction on an international site for museums, devoted to the sale of antiquities. It wasn't long before your father got in touch, said he was interested, said he wanted to come and have a look at it.

He visited us in January and we shared our stories, following which, he said, he believed the British Library would offer a large sum for Musa's writings. When he read them, he got excited about the idea that there was, in fact, more there. The idea that Musa and Edmund might have brought something back from Sinai, something important. He was unwilling to tell us exactly what he thought it was. Musa mentions that he buried Edmund but he doesn't say where. The description of Alboran in his diaries made Henry wonder if Edmund was buried there, together with something valuable only to Edmund and not for Musa. Otherwise, he would not have relinquished it. We took Henry to the island and searched the island but found nothing. Henry wanted to return to England, get better resources together so that he could have another look. We looked forward to welcoming him back…until the news came of the explosion in the museum and his death." Sadiq looked around the room which had become quiet. "We knew then that our hopes were crushed. That the British Library would not be buying Musa's diary after all."

Mariam put a large plate of food on the table and gestured for Thea to eat as she began to read."I am sorry for my treatment of you before. I did not know that you were the daughter of Summers. Please accept my deepest sympathies for your loss. He was a good man."

"Let me ask you something," said Sadiq, "if you did not know any of this, how is it that you have come here, that you have found us?"

The food was delicious but the conversation much more intriguing. Thea put her fork down and took a long swig of her glass of water. "He wrote it down. I found his diary. Dad was very excited about what he thought might be on Alboran but he wasn't the only one. Others knew about it, maybe because he had told them, maybe because they were watching him. I don't know. I found out about his trip to Alboran after he had died. I did not know much about his work until then." She paused. Error 404 had resources that meant they could be listening and watching right now. She must not tell them everything, she must hold most of it back, give this family enough, just what they needed to hear.

"There might still be money in this for you, for both of us." If this uncovers a missing part of the Sinai Codex, she thought, it would be priceless. "A lot of money. But you will have to be patient. Could I see your ancestor's diaries? Have you got them nearby?"

Sadiq looked at Mariam and she nodded in approval. He went out of a door behind the bar and returned a few minutes later with a folder. Opening it up, he pulled out a sheaf of photocopied papers covered with illegible writing.

"Mariam will read it to you as it is in Arabic. I do not think you can translate this?"

Thea smiled and shook her head. "Do you mind if I take notes?" she asked, opening the journal and turning to a blank page.

"Not at all. The first entry is dated *30 Jumaada al-awaal 945* . It is Islamic calendar," she explained, "about 1538 in our dates. October."

"One of the Infidel prisoners has become my friend. We have talked of nothing but our passion for the pilgrimage that lies ahead of us. The peace that we long for will lie at the end of it. Edmund's part in the battle of Preveza was born as much from the devotion to his God as my devotion to the True Path.

We look for a chance to leave. My oath to Seydi Ali Reis is fulfilled in two weeks. We set out for Sinai then. I am permitted to take a slave from the prisoners so of course, I will choose Edmund.

15 Jumaada al-thani 945

We camp on my first night of freedom from the military and for Edmund, his first night of freedom from imprisonment. We talk of the nature of God and he reveals his dissatisfaction with his King because he has rejected the teaching of the European capital, Rome. This is a shock for me, that a man who has offered his life in battle disagrees with his monarch. His name is the eighth Henry. In their country, they believe that a man must only have one wife and no courtesans. This is their religion, but the eighth Henry wishes to change the law so that he may have another wife. Become a Muslim, I told him. Our way is to allow more than one. Think of Ibrahim, the father of Ishmael, the father of Isaac. He had more than one wife. Edmund is too shocked by this proposal. He says that he left his country to obey the Pope Paul's summons to fight the Ottomans as part of a Holy League. He is not going to change his religion now that his job is done.

26 Jumada al-thani 945

I have not been able to write these past twelve days. The passage from Preveza to Cairo has been too difficult. Neither Edmund or myself have much of a stomach for rough seas. We tried to pass the time by telling our stories of childhood. He began life in a place called Carbrooke. It is the English home of his Order, the Knights Hospitallers. He had intended to go to Jerusalem after the battle but our discussions have convinced him of the need to travel instead to the place where my namesake, Musa, talked with God on the mountain, and where the bush was on fire but did not burn up. He is amazed to find that my father named me after our prophet, who he calls Moses. We are both looking forward to climbing the Holy Mountain."

"Amazing," Thea breathed, "I can't believe it! I grew up in Carbrooke, my mother and brother are buried there at the same church…" she thought back to the day of Dad's funeral, standing outside the church, a place where perhaps Edmund once stood before he set out on his journey to the East.

"There is more, do you want me to continue?" Mariam asked.

"Yes… but where does it end? Does he talk about the journey here, to Alboran? What does he say about Edmund's burial?"

"There is a change in the style of writing. He has written regular entries like this until their arrival at Saint Catherine's Monastery but then it stops. We think that the rest of these entries were lost somewhere. He wrote the remainder from memory when he was settled here in Melilla, looking back over the past." She flipped a few pages over and then continued. "Here it is, this is where he talks about the burial.

I do not want to record the battle that we took part in. Edmund's humiliation at being found in the ship of an Ottoman by the Spanish led him to hide in the bowels of the ship. I went up on deck at the command of Hamet and was almost killed by a volley of cannon from Mendoza's galley. Our ship was washed ashore and when I revived, I could not find Edmund's body in the wreckage. I had nothing to bury but I found a chest full of his precious keepsakes, the papers of scripture that we had preserved from the Monastery. I do not know how those next few days passed. I was alone without food or water and I barely knew what I was doing. In my attempt to honor my friend I closed the chest and buried it in his name.

I still think of him and remember all that we shared.

Many times I have been to honor him with prayer and fasting, returning to the site to set up stones of memorial to him according to his religion. It is a comfort to me now that these turbulent times are coming to an end, that I can remember my good friend in peace."

"It doesn't say where he was buried."

"No, but there is a stone there, maybe more than one unless they have been moved or destroyed."

"Where is it that this boat was wrecked?"

"Again, we don't know. It could have been against the coast of Melilla. Henry thought that it was Alboran. He wanted to study the battle, to see where Ali Hamet's boat went down. He said that there were ways of doing that these days. It is yet another thing that has died with him and with our hopes."

Thea sighed. It could all be a massive wild goose chase. Yet sitting here with these people, she felt safe, for now. What would happen if she did find the missing section of the Sinai Codex? Grayson was dead. Her father was gone and any attempt to sell it would just attract the attention of Error 404 who would find a way to destroy it. This wasn't up to her. She needed to stay here, wait until the UN, the government, MI5, whoever it was, could defeat them. She wondered about the Logos, wherever they were. Why didn't they make themselves known and protect it for her? There wasn't a worse time to publicize a newly found part of the Bible. If she found something on Alboran, she thought, she would keep it quiet.

This family was all she had for now. They seemed to accept her. She needed to make that last for as long as possible.

"So, we go to Alboran tomorrow?" said Alejandro.

Thea smiled. "Why not?" she said.

Chapter 9 Day 12, Alboran Island

Skimming over the waves, with the wind in her hair and clinging on for all she was worth, Thea felt as though she had never been more alive. Alejandro looked back at her, grinning from the wheel of the mini-cruiser, a twenty-foot boat designed to ferry tourists to and from Alboran in relative comfort.

Sadiq took the role of guide, pointing out dolphins, turtles, even a shark. The sun shone brightly and Thea tipped her head back, appreciating the crystal blue sky above her, the tiny trail of an airplane reminding her of where she was this time yesterday, looking down on the Mediterranean from 32,000 feet.

"How much longer?" she shouted, not wanting it to end.

"Another hour. Relax!" Alejandro turned from his place at the wheel, holding on with one hand as the little boat burned its wake behind him through the otherwise gentle swell of the calm sea.

Thea gripped onto the side of the boat and looked ahead. A small dot of land appeared on the horizon.

"Alborán!" Alejandro gestured with a smile.

As they reached the shoreline, Thea felt the air grow a little colder. Dark clouds had covered the sun and a stiff wind began to blow.

"Here." A jacket was thrust into her hands. "Tourists often forget how cold it might be out here. We keep spares just in case."

Thea nodded gratefully at Sadiq as they bobbed up close to a landing stage, protruding from a small beach on the southern end of the island. The worn wooden quay was decorated with pale pink, sea-worn buoys.

"You know this place well, don't you?" she laughed, jumping out of the boat onto the rickety wooden planks.

"We come here a lot in the summer with divers. It is a no-fishing zone you see, loads of species of fish which you don't get in the other popular places. Also, there is the red coral, endangered, and seagrass meadows. There are birdwatchers, flower specialists. These things are special and make it famous. Scientists go crazy for the variety of species; this is another reason for the divers. Something to do with the mixing of water between the Atlantic and the Mediterranean. Sometimes there is a tourist like you who wants to walk around the island instead because they like the isolation of it, the romance. We show them the lighthouse, the keeper's dwelling, the migrating birds and the rare flowers that grow here. We need a permit of course. The coastguards use it and immigrants often stop here. That sort of thing."

Looking around, Thea realized that he was right; this place was an immigration route. Everywhere she could see bits of rubbish, orange flotation vests, some clothes, even shredded pieces of rubber dingy. Drink cans, biscuit and sweet wrappers, together with crushed and twisted water bottles littered the shore.

They climbed the steep hill along a concrete ramp to get to the flat plateau, rising at least fifteen meters above the sea. Birds wheeled and cried above them, swooping around the lighthouse which reared, yellow and splendid above them.

"111 feet high, last inhabited in 1966. Now projects a flat, white light visible for fifteen miles. Some say that the Greeks had a beacon burning on this island from 900BC to warn ships on their way to trade in Gibraltar."

"Not bad," said Thea.

They stood in front of the lighthouse, their backs to the edifice built over one hundred years before. The rest of the island was made of flat rock, featureless apart from a landing pad for a helicopter.

It only took them thirty minutes or so to check over the whole of the island. They found a rectangle of low stones at the far end that might once have been a house of some sort, a modern warehouse with military markings and a small asbestos hut, locked.

Did Musa bury Edmund's belongings here? She thought of the explosion at the British Library and the bombs around the world that had obliterated all ancient witness to Biblical texts, cutting the modern Bible adrift from its historical origins. She thought of her father's life-work, looking after the Sinai Codex, now destroyed. His success, a lifetime of research, rested on pages of manuscripts that now no longer existed. Could there be something here, on this outcrop of rock, a manuscript that hadn't been reduced into particles in the atmosphere? That could link back to the past, the link that Error 404 was so keen to cut?

A fat splat of something fell on her arm. At first, she thought it was a seagull but then she realized it was a raindrop. More drops followed,

slapping on the rocks around her, covering the exposed stone with dark grey shadows. The light dimmed enough for the light of the lighthouse to become visible above her.

"Over here!" shouted Alejandro, running towards the entrance of the lighthouse keeper's dwelling. Although the door was locked, an ample porch gave them protection.

"Just a shower, I think," said Sadiq, crowding in with Mariam. The four of them zipped up their jackets and stood with their backs to the rain as spray flecked in from around them.

"Did you find anything?"

"No," she said. She put her hand on the front door of the house and pushed at it without luck. "Have you ever been here? Maybe there's a cellar or something underneath it, do you know if they built on a previous building or anything?"

"It's always been shut up like this when I've come here. Belongs to the military now. Probably riddled with alarm systems and cameras."

Thea sighed. She wasn't a natural explorer. She didn't want to break in or annoy the authorities. She didn't want to get this family in trouble, however much they needed the money that might eventually come to them for Musa's diary.

"Guess I'll have to get in touch with the right people so that they can show me around inside."

Sadiq frowned, sympathetic. "You'll need to go to Almeira for that. Mainland Spain. Probably have to apply to the military. Sorry."

"It's been a fun trip," said Mariam, "good to get out of the restaurant and have the wind in my hair."

"Better than cleaning and washing the dishes, too," Alejandro laughed, "Thanks, Thea."

"They'll still be there for you when you get back," Mariam reminded him with a grin.

"Let's go," said Sadiq, "this doesn't look like it's going to stop soon." They walked out into the rain and looked over towards the stone pier where the little cruiser bobbed up and down in waves much bigger than before. Sheets of grey-white rain coursed down as far as they could see in the direction of Melilla. "I should have taken the forecast seriously," he mumbled to himself, "they said there might be some weather but it didn't seem as bad as this.

"Back to the porch, then?" Thea shouted above the increasing wind that suddenly gusted and whipped at the hood of her borrowed jacket.

The others turned back with her and they retreated to the only shelter available on the island. Under the porch, Thea noticed a small metal plaque nailed to the stone wall that she hadn't seen before. It was a map of the island. She squinted to read the words indicating the different areas. Her eye was drawn to one word, written at the far end of the island where the low rectangle of stones was. *Cementario* .

"What is that word, in English?" she pointed to it.

"Cemetery. Graves."

Thea spun round. "I'm going to have a look at it a bit more closely."

Sadiq followed her as they battled against the wind and rain to the end of the island. It seemed bleakest here, a small promontory sticking out, surrounded on three sides by the gushing, thrashing sea, looking out to a large rock that must at some point have been part of the island.

The low rectangle of stones didn't yield any more information but just beyond it, about ten meters away near the edge of the cliff, there were three flat, rough slabs lying on the ground which Thea hadn't noticed when they looked before. They were covered with mosses and lichen, not to mention tufts of tough grass that clung to its surface but when Thea pulled at them, they peeled off to reveal lettering, shallow and hard to read. Sadiq helped

her, scraping away at the surface to remove the growth on top of it. The rain continued to pour down on their fingers, growing muddy and cold as they found numbers, a date. 1804.

"It's too late. Let's look at the others."

They spent their energy scraping to find more dates: 1798, 1803. They were interesting but not early enough.

"This is not the place. Edmund is not here. These graves are over two hundred and fifty years after he and Musa were here." Sadiq's patience was running out in the face of the battering rain. Thea's teeth gritted together, wanting to understand, trying to put together the facts that she had and searching for clues.

"Hey, here's another!" he shouted as he walked away. Thea jogged over to it. It was only partially visible and she realized that it was clever of Sadiq to have spotted it. After further investigation, they were disappointed again. 1796.

"These dates are so close together. What happened then?"

"French Revolutionary wars, Spanish versus the English. These are English names, English graves. Probably sailors, shipwrecked here, marooned maybe, exiled."

Thea stood looking from the fourth grave up towards the other three, thinking about Napoleon and how he was exiled on another Mediterranean island, Elba, not long after that, in 1814. A symbol at the top of the slab caught her eye. It was like an arrow with a wide point. The arrow pointed towards the middle of the other three graves. She walked back to them and saw that they each had a similar arrow, all pointing towards the same middle point. Something about the shape and style of the arrows reminded her of something. If she joined them together, they made a very familiar symbol. A symbol drawn in her father's journal. A cross, square, four triangles joining at their points, their bases notched like arrowheads. The symbol of the Knights Hospitallers, the order of Edmund Somers. Had Musa been here after all?

Thea paced over to stand in the middle point of the four arrows on the four graves. The ground she was standing on looked the same as the rest of the mossy soil covering the whole island. Or was it? She brushed her hand over the wet ground, soaked with the rain, still pelting down, slapping against the sturdy hood of her jacket. She dug into the moss with her fingers and gestured to Sadiq to help her. It was deeper than the moss on the other graves but the soil beneath it was only a couple of inches thick and came away from the stone beneath easily. As they lifted a piece the size of her hand, she saw a number engraved there. 94. The earth from the sides of the hole, newly exposed to the elements, bled dark rivulets of rain onto the hole as Thea grappled with wet handfuls of soil, pulling it away to expose more of this line of numbers. There was a 7 and that was it - 947. Another minute of digging unearthed a symbol, the hospitallers' cross and then the letters ES. Edmund Somers.

Thea sat back on her soaked legs, her knees wet and cold, her heart triumphant.

"This is it," she breathed. "It's here."

"Musa," said Sadiq, "This date, it is the year of the Battle of Alboran in the Islamic calendar. 947 is 1540."

They looked at each other, Sadiq and Thea, direct descendants of the two men who had been friends five hundred years before, at the very place Musa had honored his friend.

"So you have found it!" said Sadiq, "the place where Musa buried the chest!"

Thea smiled. "We need to lift this stone and see what is underneath it." She began searching for the edges of the slab. The whole piece of rock was about a meter long and half as wide. It had been roughly cut but it was huge and she knew instantly that there was no way she would be able to move this on her own. Her heart faltered. If only Dad was here. This was his dream, not hers.

The tone changed. Sadiq was shouting at her and pointing at the sky. She looked up as the rain dashed in her eyes. There was something large and black up there, a noise consuming her, chopping at the air, adding turbulence, more wind. A helicopter landing at the helipad, people jumping out and running towards her, with guns.

Sadiq leaped at her and pushed her to the ground as shots whistled past them. Were they shooting at her? Trapped under Sadiq, she couldn't see anything. He wasn't moving. Then his weight on her eased, and she was hauled to her feet by men in black boiler suits, their faces hidden by helmets, guns slung around their bodies.

Frantically, she looked around for an escape but there was nowhere to run.

One of the men pulled off his helmets with some difficulty and Thea was shocked to realize that she recognized the face.

"Hello my dear," said Brian, "have you found it yet?"

Chapter 10 2 weeks before, London

Professor Henry Summers lent back in his wooden armchair, tipping it back and rubbing his eyes with satisfaction, relieved that the 'do not disturb' message on his door had finally got through to his mindless interns. He felt a small surge of victory at the rate of progress he was making in his work. He'd been staring at these screens for over four hours straight, no-one had interrupted him and he was getting temptingly close to finding the location of an artifact that could change the direction of Biblical scholarship. Grayson would be so pleased. He owed him this.

Now he just needed to get his daughter to talk to him.

He switched his computer into sleep mode and stood up, his stiff knee giving him the familiar twinge that reminded him not to move too quickly. As he straightened up, he arranged the papers beside his keyboard and slid the corner of a torn envelope on a page to mark the place in his current leather-covered journal. Closing it, he stretched a black length of elastic

over the front cover to keep it shut and squared it straight, placing his favorite pen and other papers parallel to it. He ran his finger over the familiar, faded symbol on its front. He needed to put it back in the usual place. It held too much importance, now.

Was she ignoring him on purpose?

He pulled on his jacket and tightened his tie. Another funding committee meeting to attend. His research had a healthy stream of income but others weren't as fortunate. He believed in their research just as much as his own and these meetings needed to be endured.

Henry closed the door of his office in the labyrinthine bowels of the British Library and slid a solid square of mahogany to the position covering the word 'in' instead of 'out. A present from a former colleague who shared his love of communications that didn't require electricity.

As the self-locking door clicked shut behind him, he glanced up and down the white corridor, featureless and blank, removing the door hanger and sliding it back under his door. He only passed two people as he made his way past numerous research studios and offices identical to his own. He knew that each one housed unbelievably specific knowledge and expertise in areas that he would never even think of, had he not developed the habit of gently interrogating anyone he met about their work. He talked to them in the staff coffee lounge, in the public cafe, on the study tables throughout the many foyers, corridors, and halls that wound around the many floors of this institution, anywhere that anyone would talk to him. This place drew the most fascinating people, famous as it was for purportedly owning a copy of every single book that had ever been published.

The underground floor that he had just come up from hovered relatively high up in this iceberg-like structure that sank deep into the London clay, opening into warehouse-sized spaces far below, full of precisely-controlled temperature, airflow, and light to house the many, many, millions of published volumes it contained. Henry smiled. There were some of his titles down there. *The Alexandrian Text* , *Parchment and Papyrus* and *Uncial Script Pre-300AD* were just a few of them. There would be more, too, except that his writing interfered with his real work, his life's calling. He

wouldn't give that up, no matter how many pleading phone calls from his agent he had to negotiate.

If only he could say the same for his daughter. He didn't know what to do about her. Perhaps Brian would have some timely words of advice. Henry stepped into the air-filtration pen and without thinking held his arms out, letting the purple beam scour his person for stolen documents, letters or books, explosives or other dangerous substances. After it had beeped to allow him through, he stepped out of an ordinary-looking side door into the main open hall of the Library, where members of the public came in through their security checks.

As he approached the exit, he saw his mark. Brian Truman was searching bags, using a long metal baton to move items around inside them, occasionally putting his hands in, turning items over. Henry remembered spotting this generously proportioned man a couple of months before when he was new to the security team. The size of his hands had caught his attention. Huge thumbs. A day later, he'd spotted him eating a bacon and cheese turnover, sitting out on the wall in the courtyard by the Newton statue just outside the main entrance. He just couldn't help himself, he found people interesting and even though he knew he could be borderline rude when he got going, all his life he'd been used to people warming to him, telling him things about themselves, letting him pry. So he talked to them and they seemed to like it.

This was how he knew a whole load about Brian. Yes, he'd worked in security before. No, it wasn't at a museum, yes it was for a private firm, no, it wasn't that it was boring, the salary was, in fact, better than here. Yes he was married, yes his wife still made him a packed lunch, yes, this was more fulfilling and something of public service and value rather than just helping rich people to stay rich. No, the money didn't make much difference, yes he was retiring soon, no, he couldn't wait.

Henry also worked out that Brian tended to lie about forty-five percent of the time.

"You've got kids, am I right, Mr. Truman?" Henry approached from behind, placing one supportive hand on the broad shoulder of the security uniform

jacket ready to steady the guard as he reacted.

"Oh! Professor didn't see you there!" Brian's face cracked with a smile that didn't get out much.

"Please, don't stop on account of me," Henry said, perching on a security table with his hands planted either side of him and his legs crossed at the ankles. "Just wondering whether you'd ever had problems with getting them to keep in contact, you know, after they'd left home."

"One of each, I've got, Professor," Brian dismissed the woman whose bag had been searched and nodded at the next in the queue, beckoning her over, "one lives in Australia and we're lucky to get so much as a Christmas phone call out of him and the other lives just down the street and won't leave us alone, our granddaughter almost lives at our place, too."

"So what should I do about my daughter, then?"

"What did you say her name was?"

"Thea, she's not talking to me."

"Don't think you can force it, Professor. Let her come to you."

"You're probably right, Brian. Thank you, good advice."

"You're welcome, Professor."

Henry shifted himself off the table."Well, I've got to be going. Got a meeting South of the river."

"You be careful down there, Professor. Dangerous people."

Henry laughed, slapping Brian on the back. "Keep doing a good job, Brian, some of them might even try and get in here!"

"Can't agree more. You take care now, Professor."

"Until later, Mr. Truman."

The meeting wasn't for another hour but Henry had enough time to get to his favorite bookshop, just off Tottenham Court Road, in the booksellers' district of London. Only the serious independent sellers set up here and most had been established for well over two hundred years. This shop specialized in cartography. Maps of every chartered area of the world could be obtained here in a variety of ratios. It was tucked into a small terrace down an alleyway behind a much bigger, well-known independent bookseller. Along the alleyway were other specialist shops too. One sold books relating to magic and the other, birds.

The map-seller was expecting Henry and had set out three rolled-up maps on the edge of the bare, two-meter-squared expanse of table in the center of the main room. He had already pulled down the blinds in the windows and now moved to lock the door behind him when it closed.

"If you are ready, we will start by looking at those items you ordered, Professor," he said, efficiently moving to the side of the table where the maps were, putting on some clean, white, cotton gloves and picking up the glasses hanging around his neck to perch them on his nose.

Henry walked straight past him into the next room of the shop and looked up the stairs.

"Anyone else here?" he asked quickly.

"No-one," came the reply, "just sent my assistant, Jake, out for an extended lunch. He thinks it's Christmas come early!"

"Great. Thanks for this, George. I appreciate it. You've switched everything off?"

"I am familiar with your requirements, Professor. Wifi, phone, computer, all off. You want me to cut off the electricity and water too?"

"Yes, very funny, George. You must forgive me for being over-cautious."

"I am at your service. All is as you would expect, I can assure you."

"Terrific. Now, can we begin by looking at the most recent survey of the island, with the subterranean features marked."

The shop-owner expertly rolled out the map, securing it with custom-made clamps at the side of the specially designed viewing table which lit the map from below, accentuating every symbol and mark. Henry drew in a sharp breath. He smoothed the map like a fine silk, tracing a cave system through the central spine of the landmass and circling his middle finger around a chamber which, according to the key, opened up ten feet or so below the visible surface.

"So it is there," he breathed.

"Glad that you've found what you are looking for, Professor."

"Yes, this is great. I'll examine it more closely later. Let's have a look at the others."

"This next one is the underwater geological survey, only completed last month. I've checked the data and the equipment that generated it to ensure that it is accurate to 0.001mm. I generated this map for your particular use only. No one else but you and I have seen it."

"Extraordinary," breathed Henry, "these vessels, you would never have known…"

"The previous seabed images never picked them up. Tell me, when you commissioned this, how did you know, that there would be so many?"

Henry breathed in, tipped his head back with a self-congratulatory smile and sighed. "I just need the maps, George. I can't discuss any further than that. Who else knows?"

"I sent my men on this one, a very specialized team. Two of the best there are. They didn't know who asked and they have no interest in the subject matter beyond getting paid."

"Good. The third?"

"This last one is the single satellite photo. Extreme magnification. Look, even the flora is visible. I managed to access the feed to gain an image every hour for a week as stipulated. This memory stick contains all of the existing images. Everything else has been erased beyond traceability so that all data, everything, apart from the items and information that now belong to you, cannot be used further."

Henry pocketed the stick. "Can I arrange for these to get to me in the usual way, George? I need to get to a meeting but these can proceed to the library. You've done well. I'm very grateful. Please don't forget about the additional precautions."

As Henry left, George grinned that business was as healthy as this. He switched the Wi-fi back on and powered up his tablet and phone, reflecting that Henry's retainer alone was enough to pay the overheads of this top London site. The difficulties that he faced fulfilling the lists of demands requested by this particular client were completely worth it. Even if they tempted him, just a little bit, to find out more, he wouldn't yield. He was a respectable man.

George remembered the warning brief that Henry had given him when he had started ordering through him. He looked up and down the lamp-lit alley before getting the front door key out. A movement through the glass of the empty shop on the corner caught his eye but he couldn't quite tell if he had seen anything or not. It was enough to worry him. He liked to be thorough.

He let himself back into the dark shop. The tinkle of the bell on the door sounded loud as he locked it behind himself and urgently tapped the unlock code into the alarm system. George crouched behind the display table and waited, hoping that he was being ridiculous and over-cautious.

As he checked his watch and promised himself that he would only stay here for a few minutes more, the door rattled. Someone was trying the handle. They would go away, realizing that they were shut.

A scratching noise brought his heart up into his throat. There was a click and the handle turned, the bell tinkling. Someone had forced their way in. There was a nervous moment and then the doorbell rang again and there

was silence. When George had built up the courage he needed to look and see a few minutes later, he stood up in the empty shop to find that the precious maps on the table had gone.

Chapter 11 2 days before, Buckingham Palace

Simon Derridge splashed water over his face and marveled at the extravagance of the gold leaf on the frames of the enormous mirror in front of him. He picked up a freshly laundered flannel, thick and soft, from a pile on the marble surface, unrolled it and patted his face dry, hardly believing his luck. His face looked flushed as he stared at it, but his attention was diverted by the repetition of the insignia littered throughout the rooms and corridors of the building.

EIIR.

He tried to memorize everything, filing it away for retelling at the Regents' Flock later on that evening. There, at the favorite hangout of Civil Service Fast Track interns, he and others would detail their days to one another over post-work drinks.

So I was at Buckingham Palace today , he would start and the attention would instantly fall on him. That would unnerve him of course but he would grip his pint glass a little more tightly and remember the gold leaf and continue.

Yes, posted there just this morning, didn't know my Department was involved until I came into the office first thing. Consulting with the palace on the upcoming Coronation. I know, such a privilege. Can't believe it.

Simon grinned at his reflection, wiping the last drops from his face, tempted to use the hand cream, also decorated with the royal emblem. Moisturiser never got on with him, though and he suspected that it would affect his allergies. The last thing he wanted to take back into the meeting was a face full of blotches.

A cubicle door banged behind him and he realized that he wasn't alone. The figure arriving at the sink beside him was none other than George Wilson, the Deputy Prime Minister. Simon wavered between staying and washing his hands again or leaving as he had initially intended. It was moments like this, opportunities for associating with greatness, that made the post-work debriefs more impressive.

He chose to stay.

"So, how do you think it's going, Sir?" he asked tentatively. There was no reply. Maybe he'd chosen the wrong moment, spoken too softly, got it wrong somehow. He didn't have the guts to try again.

"It's all on track." The confident voice rang out behind him as Simon moved to the exit. The Deputy PM sighed audibly. "It's going to take time though, to get all the changes we want. I may need to put you in particular onto a special assignment to gather the material we need to secure some of them."

Special assignment? Simon almost had to put his hand out to steady himself.

"Me? Of course, Sir. Anything, yes, I will."

He couldn't make any of his sentences come out right. The Deputy PM finished drying his hands and gestured to the door. Simon realized that he had been standing there, staring.

"Shall we?"

"Yes, Sir, Yes." Simon opened the door and found himself standing to attention. He was glad that he hadn't given a full salute.

Back in the enormous meeting room, chandeliers and rich red brocade curtains set the scene, dwarfing the huge table around which the Coronation Committee was hard at work. There were eleven of them in all. Simon followed after Deputy PM George Wilson as they returned to their seats.

"Oh, before you sit down?" Wilson held out his coffee cup to Simon and waved it at the machine on the trolley, "White, two sugars". Simon walked over and took the cup from him, not wanting to mess it up. He hoped that this wasn't the full extent of his 'special assignment'.

"So, where have we got to?" The Earl Marshall, the 19th Duke of Norfolk, Thomas Howard, chair of the committee, seemed anxious to reconvene the meeting after the short break.

"We're behind," the abrupt voice of the Archbishop's representative boomed. "We were called by the overall Coronation Committee to decide on the wording of the service and the practical timings and logistics required. We have spent an hour talking about what happened last time, so can we now please get on with the details of the thing?"

Wilson nodded to the man on his left, who stood up with a sheaf of papers and handed them round. "I'll be taking these back in after this session. They are for your eyes only. This is a proposal for an updated wording of the service."

The Archbishop's representative flicked through the two-page document and flicked it aside in disgust.

Simon's Department Minister, The Rt Hon Freya McNair, looked evenly at Wilson. "This is surprisingly drastic, George."

"We've got to start somewhere," Wilson said, pushing a note of humor into his voice, "I thought that a radical rewrite might help us all to focus."

"You've got our attention," The Earl Marshall retorted, "but it's a waste of time. No-one is going to sign off on this, or anything near it!"

Simon stood, hovering, behind the Deputy PM, impressed with the experienced politician's steady hands on papers which would be dancing around in his own. It was hard enough to put the cup of coffee down onto the table without slopping it.

The man to his right glanced at him, grabbed a coaster and pointedly put it under the cup with a shake of his head.

Simon retreated to his seat next to Freya McNair. She talked to his boss, Daran Garayan, her Chief Civil Servant, who turned, pushed a file towards him and tapped his finger on it.

"Get to work," he hissed, "Re-read the previous service wording, now. Analyze the main differences between that and Wilson's proposal. You're here because I hear you're good at this sort of thing. You've got five minutes before I'll need to present."

Simon wanted more than anything to listen to the conversation that was getting increasingly heated around him but he switched off and focused on the job that Garayan had given him. This level of interaction with such secret documents was incredible. As he worked, making a few notes, he began to understand why the reaction of the Earl Marshall and the Archbishop's representative had been so strong.

Wilson's rewrite had taken out any mention of God.

For some reason, it reminded Simon of one of the only times he had ever been inside a church. An uncle's wedding, when he was about sixteen. His family had never 'done God' but this relative had chosen to convert to Christianity even though everyone thought that's what he was in the first place. His new wife's family were those evangelical types. Full of enthusiasm for the Lord. He had stood up ramrod straight in his best suit alongside his parents on the groom's side, singing songs which he thought were better suited to Radio Love Songs than Church. Meanwhile, on the bride's side, there were hands in the air, waving and dancing, eyes closed and humming when the music stopped. Quite bizarre.

Maybe Wilson had been put off by something similar.

"Mr. Derridge?"

Simon looked up. The whole of the table was looking straight at him.

"Pardon me?"

Garayan elbowed him, his eyes widening and indicating the documents with a gesture of frustration. "You're going to give us a summary of the differences between the two services?"

The furious, reddened faces around the table told him that he couldn't mess up. Thankfully, he knew exactly what to say, clearing his voice as he spoke.

"Sorry, yes, well, as I see it, the new rewrite that the, erm, the Deputy, er, Prime Minister is proposing, erm. Well, it misses out the following from the 1953 service:

1. The promise to govern countries that are no longer part of the Commonwealth.

2. Swearing an oath to maintain the laws of God and the profession of the gospel

3. Promising to uphold the Church.

4. The presentation of a Bible

5. Prayers, being anointed with holy oil with symbolic cloaks and the significance of the Stone of Scone.

6. Reciting the words of Zadok the Priest

7. Prayers during the actual crowning

8. The ceremonial shouting of 'God save the King'

9. All traditional choral works containing Bible texts

10. Investing the sovereign with regalia that has religious significance

He stopped and looked up.

"Is that it?" asked Noah Faraday, the House of Bishops Representative, "what's left?"

"Well," Simon said, "this new service allows the new King to be presented to the people. He promises to serve the countries that do still recognize the British monarchy. He is crowned."

He stopped. Wanting someone to take over. Feeling that his analytical skills were used up, he was terrified of giving an opinion. He looked at Garayan who whispered to McNair, who sat with a poker face, clearly unwilling to communicate her feelings.

No-one spoke.

The Earl Marshall looked at Wilson. "You want to get rid of all mention of God from this service? Are you completely mad?"

Wilson leaned back, confident. "It's not if but when, Thomas. Look at the statistics, look at the numbers of people in church. No-one wants God around anymore. No-one is close to believing anything that Elizabeth II signed up to in 1953."

McNair showed her hand, "The Coronation must take place," she said, "but I agree, we don't need a religious service. We can have processions up and down the Mall, get the golden carriage out, photos on the balcony, a big banquet, rock concert with the young royals dancing in their box. Job done.'

"Do the people even want a monarchy?" Wilson posited, throwing in the final blow.

The Earl Marshall stood up, furious, "You're talking about major constitutional change!" he spat, "you're talking about a Republic! This is treason!"

Noah Faraday also leaped to his feet, "I never trusted your rhetoric, you New Liberals. We knew that you were after more. You want a secular republic, don't you? Is that what you're planning for the United Kingdom?"

"Gentlemen, please," Freya McNair's resounding voice rang through the increased tension, "getting angry is not going to help us. We have a Coronation to plan. That is what we are here to do. We have a starting point. Let's start making some compromises."

"May I suggest that we begin with some practical arrangements," Daran Garayan said firmly, "let's begin with something that we all agree with. Which cathedral are we going to use?"

They all looked around at him as if he was mad. Even Simon knew the answer to that one. His boss was panicking.

"Westminster," he whispered.

"And I suppose that what we're talking about is Madison wanting to be President?" shouted the nineteenth Duke of Norfolk. Is that what we're looking at? Ban the aristocracy? Sell all the royal lands? Give everything to the poor?"

The Civil Servants in the room looked at each other with wearied tolerance. Their job was to put the government's plans into action. They were used to situations where the government found it difficult to convince others that their ideas were best. The skill was to hold back on any action until the Ministers had decided what they wanted to do.

Daran Garayan spoke again, gathering confidence. "May I suggest that we stop thinking in terms of Constitutional change or Republicanism and focus on the short term? We are planning an event which is to happen in eight months. We need to decide on a service that will be appropriate for the Constitution that we do have.

The Earl Marshall was seated again and took up Wilson's discarded service proposal. "What's your name again?"

"Derridge, Simon Derridge."

"Right, Simon. How many elements of the service did you list back there? Ten, was it?"

"Yes, Sir."

"We'll go through those elements of the service one by one. Let's compromise," he breathed in deeply, "we need to choose to keep three in favor of the monarchy and three in favor of the Christian foundation of the country. The rest we will drop. That way, the interests of those seated around the table and therefore the interests of the country, will be served."

The palace representative next to him whispered something to him.

"Let each delegation, the government, the church, and the palace, all present their ideal service, based on the ten changed elements that we have heard about so far."

Simon sat, mesmerized, as the groups convened around the room and prepared their presentations, based on his analysis. It felt surreal to be at the center like this, glorious even. Yet he was deeply disappointed at the same time because he knew that he could not share this in any pub any time soon.

Simon Derridge was staring into his coffee, watching the swirls whizz around the cup, following them with his spoon. He didn't usually take sugar but he needed something extra right now. The movement in his cup reflected his thoughts as they spun, confused.

The special assignment that the Deputy Prime Minister had given him seemed like a dud at first. After the conversation by the gold-framed mirrors, nothing more had been said about it and he'd wondered if the great man had mistaken him for someone else.

Then a few days later, Daran Garayan had called him over to his desk and thrust a package at him. It had his name on it, together with the stamp from the Deputy PM's office.

"You know what this is?" Garayan had asked tersely, usually the one to give Simon his daily schedule.

Simon's heart had leaped. "Er, maybe…" he said, not wanting to say anything until he knew what was inside.

"Go on then, open it," Garayan insisted.

There was nowhere private to go. It wasn't like he had his own office. Even Garayan had to work in the open-plan set-up and only the Rgt Hon Freya McNeish had a wall to separate her ministerial greatness from the lowly workers.

He opened it. Inside was a copy of the King James Bible and a single generic House of Commons compliments slip covered with a handwritten scrawl. *Special assignment as promised.* It read. *Get me five statements to address the irrelevance of point two on your list. You have a week. GW.*

Simon thought quickly. Point two was about the presentation of the Ceremonial Bible to the new monarch. His memory, sharp as ever, recalled the words used in the 1953 service; 'We present you with this Book, the most valuable thing this world affords. Here is wisdom. This is the Royal Law. These are the very lively oracles of God.'

He grinned. This would be easy. He imagined these words being said in a Coronation service broadcast to millions, billions even, around the globe in three months. They would raise nothing but disinterest. Wilson was right... The Bible, valuable? Wisdom? Royal Law? There weren't many who thought that this crusty old set of beliefs could be the *Oracles of God* these days. Even the idea of arguing about it had faded since the Humanists and New Liberals had pointed out the ridiculous nature of God and faith. It was so antiquated. He hadn't heard anyone try to argue for God since his early undergraduate days. Those Christian groups with their free bread and cheese lunches trying to persuade them of the impossible. They'd soon been shut down for being unwilling to budge on their intolerant beliefs.

He'd be able to do this with his eyes closed alongside the other assignments that he had on his slate at the moment. He just needed to clear his mind and get on with it. Then, he thought, he'd be off the Fast Track scheme and into the real heart of the Civil Service before he knew it. If he could show Wilson his prowess in this, who knows what he would give him to do next?

"So?" asked Garayan.

"Just some queries about the list of points I made in the meeting. They'd left off number six and couldn't remember what it was. I'll give his office a ring now."

"Right," said Garayan with suspicion, "well, get on with it and make sure you get back soon. I need you working on the arrangements for the procession route. McNeish needs us to liaise with Parks, Police, and Highways asap. You're on Parks right now. Find out the point person for Green and St James, Yes?"

"Yes." Simon said automatically, "no problem."

Simon stirred his coffee again. He wished he had got a glass of water instead. He didn't need more caffeine. Outside, it was now dark. He ordered some food, even though he'd lost his appetite.

He was a couple of streets away from the British Library, where he'd gone during the late afternoon to check out the Coronation Show to kill two birds with one stone. He needed the historical angle on the procession and the images of the park decorations but it also allowed him to view the 1953 Coronation Bible. It only took a quick search online as he took a taxi over there to read a few critical articles by scholars who claimed that the Bible wasn't written as long ago as Christians claimed. There was strong evidence, they suggested, that much of it could have been written by monks in the Middle Ages, at the behest of the church and the Popes. They gave examples of ways in which politics had used religion for centuries to guide the thoughts and actions of the people.

After all, there was enough to worry about in life without having to think that some sort of God had created him and wanted to send him to hell if he didn't obey him. He remembered his brother's wedding. The expressions of joy on the other side of the church. Fools. They were wasting their lives. The reforms in this Coronation service were essential for everyone. For the country.

So he'd found himself in the British Library just before closing time, pressing his nose to the glass of historical exhibits of the temporary Coronation exhibition, his mind making mental notes for Garayan about

important details that could improve the route plan. When he'd got to that famous Bible that had belonged to Queen Elizabeth II, he saw that it was open at John's gospel and that there were scribbled notes in the margins, underlinings, asterisks.

Elizabeth had a personal faith, read the information slab next to it, *evidenced by her intimate knowledge of this Bible. This annotated page is no different from most of the rest of this book, which lived on her private writing desk and was present with her throughout her reign.*

She had always seemed like such a sensible person, he thought. Not a crackpot. He wanted to see more of these pages and found his way to the Reading Room request desk. After signing a few papers, he found himself in a small windowless study room wearing white cotton gloves and a face mask. The man who brought the Coronation Bible in sat opposite him while he studied it. Sure enough, almost every page was annotated in the same way as the page he had seen displayed in the exhibit. The only thing that changed was the style of handwriting. Some notes were in a youthful, round script and others were in a more shaky hand.

"Do you know anything about the history of how the Bible came to be written?" Derridge asked the man, who hung close, carefully watching his handling of the precious document.

The man had laughed. "I should do!" he said, an amused grin on his face, "it's my area."

Poor guy, Simon remembered thinking. "Okay," he said, "so how do you reconcile the importance given to this book with the lack of historical evidence for when it was written?"

"Excuse me?" said the man, "sorry, I've not caught your name?"

"Simon Derridge, I'm..."

"Simon, okay, let me introduce myself, the name's Henry, Henry Summers. I wonder, have you got a moment or two?"

Simon nodded, remembering a similar sensation to the one he felt now when he had been summoned to his Headmaster's office. Summers opened the door of the room and gestured for him to follow. "So," he mused, "historical evidence for the original writing of Biblical texts. Right."

And so his education had begun. They'd begun in the National Room of Treasures where Summers had shown him a large, old Bible, written in an incomprehensible script, part of a complete text called the Sinai Codex, written in 345 AD, or CE as Simon preferred to call it. Summers stressed that it was incomplete, that there were parts of the Old Testament part of it that were missing, presumed lost.

Then they'd gone back in time. Pieces of Greek text on papyrus from the second century, then older Old Testament documents, some Greek, some Hebrew, some scroll from the third century BCE in a room with researchers working on it. Summers fired questions at him to test his knowledge of the ancient world and Simon realized that far from being a set of recently scribed myths, there was something here, something more, something scarily historical and truthful about the paper chase through the ancient world that he had had no idea about until now.

"This is a tiny tip of a massive iceberg," Summers had said, "you can go to Leipzig, the Vatican, Jerusalem, Russia, Washington DC and look at the museums there. They've all got ancient texts on display that duplicate and expand on the range of texts that we have here in the British Library. I guess that you could say that they back up the modern Bible's claim to be a reliable transmission of the original writings." Henry took a moment, as though he was remembering something that troubled him, "We haven't found everything, though," he said, sounding anxious, "with my archaeological hat on, I'm interested in what still lies hidden, too."

"What do you mean?" Simon had asked, "isn't it all in churches and museums, like this stuff?"

"It's a funny thing, the way we humans work," pondered Summers, "history repeating itself. So many times throughout the centuries, when rulers have felt threatened or confused about religious faith, they have destroyed sacred documents, scriptures, that sort of thing. It's not just Christianity, most

religions have experienced it. And funnily enough, that's what has helped us today. We have some of our best-preserved finds from places where scriptures have been hidden away in caves and unlikely places, believers trying to preserve them before the authorities get hold of them. That's where my archaeological bug comes in. I have seen many hidden treasures unearthed myself. It is a very exciting area of work to be in."

Simon's heart had fallen as he realized that this assignment might not be as easy as he thought. In some ways, he felt like he had just walked into the lion's den. Maybe this was the hub of some sort of lie-machine that had been created for idiots like him.

"Can you, er, give me an example of an excavation?" he asked, not wanting to sound too confrontational.

Henry smiled, as though remembering an old friend, "Have you heard of the Dead Sea Scrolls?"

"Yes, I have, but I thought they disproved Christianity, I thought…"

"I'm afraid you are going to need to think again. The finds at Qumran by the Dead Sea from 1946 onwards have proved that the scribes of the Hebrew Old Testament over many hundreds of years did a far more accurate job than we could ever have imagined!"

"So why was there so much criticism of them?"

"It's all about the quality of the texts." He sighed, "how much detail do you want?"

Simon winced, "just enough to convince me…"

"Okay," Henry said, "I don't want to get overly technical with you but the scribes responsible for the transmission of the Hebrew Old Testament, called the Masoretes, were brilliant copyists. When we compared a late text that we have from the tenth century AD with the first century Dead Sea Scroll of Isaiah, we found that there were hardly any differences at all! Some grammar, maybe, and the punctuation since that was only added by

the Masoretes to help with the fluent reading of it, but apart from that, totally identical. Over a thousand years! There is no other ancient text which has ever been copied with that level of faithful consistency over that period."

Simon's head was ready to explode. If he was finding this hard to take on board then how would anyone else understand it? A voice in his head reminded him of the job in hand. He needed to impress Wilson, he had to help the Deputy PM to dismiss the need for a religious element in the Coronation service. That was all. This transmission, this stuff about the historical reliability of the Bible was irrelevant to most people anyway.

He sighed. "How do you generally respond to your critics?" he asked.

"Critics? Some try and discredit some of our texts or date them later than they should, but there are no seriously regarded academics who argue against the evidence in front of them. There are so many linguistic, paleographic, archeological and sociological areas of understanding working together, agreeing their worth - it would be scholarly suicide to attempt it."

Why don't I know this? thought Simon. In a world where we think we know that the Bible is a load of made-up legends, *why is this new to me?*

They had walked back out to the front of the museum together.

"Can I contact you if I have further questions?" asked Simon.

"Derridge, wasn't it? At the Civil Service? I'll send you some links, some more to read on the subject. Here's my card in the meantime," said Henry, "now if you will excuse me, I need to go and continue with my work. It's a late one for me tonight I'm afraid. I got something exciting I'm working on. Watch this space!" he smiled as he shook his hand and turned back away from him, the sound of his feet echoing confidently around the marble hallway.

Now, Simon sat in the cafe, still stirring his coffee. He had been for a long walk as night fell, trying to get his thoughts in order. He'd done some

searches online about the Qumran find, about the Septuagint, the Masoretes finding again and again that Henry had been telling him about real things. He'd done a pretty good job of making a highly complex subject so simple.

Wilson wanted him to discredit a religious text that scholars of all backgrounds seemed to hold a deep respect for. How was he supposed to do that? Come on, he countered, who even knows this? It's just a load of crusty academics shut up in their universities and libraries and museums all talking about things they agree about anyway and digging up and researching stuff that supports their original opinions. No-one is interested in all that, that's why no-one knows.

It's because no-one cares.

He could just get on and forget about it. He could draw up a list of objections about the Bible for Wilson and move on. No-one else needed to know what he had learned today.

He looked out of the cafe and then at his watch. It was much later than he expected. Everyone else had gone and they wanted to shut.

It was about then that a shaking roar sounded throughout the cafe like a minor earthquake. He looked around at the man wiping the tables who paused, then shrugged his shoulders and carried on.

The feed on his phone had nothing about it and he headed home, thinking it might have been an underground train but later, when he got home, the news told him what had happened, not just here in London but all over Europe, Russia, and the States. His eye was drawn to the list of cities that had been targeted. Chilled, he flipped to the notes that he had taken while Henry Summers had been talking.

Leipzig, the Vatican, Jerusalem, Russia, Washington.

Bombs had gone off in those same places.

Chapter 13 Day 2, Whitehall

Simon couldn't sleep. He scrolled through his news feed, flicking from page to page. The panic of the coverage was hypnotic. He knew right from the start that this wasn't a Muslim group or any of the usual terrorist organizations. This was different.

As he sat watching his laptop and letting the news run, he tried to focus on Wilson's task. He kept on being interrupted by friends and family calling, texting, messaging to ask if he was okay, pinging him when he didn't reply immediately. Finally, he put a post out to let them know he was fine and needed to work. He switched his phone off.

He had to impress Wilson, he had to show him that he was right to have chosen him for this assignment but he felt sick to his stomach every time he thought about Henry's words. *It would be scholarly suicide.*

You're not a scholar, the voice in his head insisted. This isn't about intellectual prowess. It's politics, pure and simple, where anything goes. You wanted to climb the ladder, didn't you? Well, this is how you do it.

Simon opened the window in his living room, looking over the busy A10. The traffic rushed by as usual and the neon lights of the takeaways and betting shops winked back at him. This is every day, he told himself, this is normal. This is the reality of most people's lives. Stop overthinking it. Get on with what needs to be done.

He breathed in deeply and quickly came up with the statements he needed to help George Wilson's PR campaign to secularise the Coronation service. They wouldn't convince anyone who knew about the historical transmission of the Bible but they would probably satisfy 99% of the population.

He read down the list that he had written in the body of a new email to Wilson and felt deeply uncomfortable. Henry Summers' words came back to him.

There are no seriously regarded academics who argue against the evidence.

Simon got up and made himself a sandwich. He caught up the remote and switched to the 24-hour news channel on TV. The image of Henry Summers

appeared in the corner of the screen, along with a headline that read 'fatalities'. Derridge felt physically sick. *What's the problem?* the voice in his head said. *This is your get-out clause! You can send the objections to Wilson without the fear of ever having to worry about that Summers bloke ever again!*

The sandwich was left uneaten as he powered the laptop back on to send the email before he let this latest news get to him. Before he could do so, the screen flickered and the email disappeared. He swore to himself. This laptop had been so reliable until now. His last one had constantly deleted work or failed to save properly, which, together with hours of start-up time had driven him crazy. This one had been quick and efficient, never letting him down.

He rewrote the email but it wouldn't let him write the word *Bible* . Or *Moses* . It simply waited, the cursor blinking at him until he chose to write another word.

Frustrated, he searched through his desk for a writing pad, deciding to do it by hand. He found a set of notelets that his mother had given him to make sure that he wrote his thank-yous last Christmas. He could hardly give Wilson his response to the special assignment in a card with purple irises on the front, could he?

Shutting his laptop, he put it in his bag and pulled on his coat. He would go to Wilson's office and tell him himself.

When he arrived at Westminster, the place was in chaos. Traffic gridlocked Whitehall and a huge number of people had gathered to protest with loudhailers, hooters, and drums.

Protect our freedom! The placards read. *Free speech for Free Citizens!*

Police in high-vis jackets sat astride motorbikes, filming the crowds. Barriers to control their movement had been erected so that workers could still get into the Parliament buildings but Derridge knew a short cut. He'd been instructed to use the civil service entrance which was situated in a building on the other side of the road from the Big Ben tower. It led into a

tunnel that took him underneath the madness and delivered him to a checkpoint in the bowels of the offices of power. From there it was simple enough to make his way around to Wilson's offices. Or at least it should have been. Today there was extra security and more people charged around the corridors than he'd ever seen before.

"And you are?" a secretary sitting beside a burly policeman challenged Simon when he got to the front of the queue.

"Derridge, Simon Derridge, Wilson needs to see me. Matter of urgency."

"Get in line, Derridge. Next!" she pointed to a packed office, seething with irritable staff.

Simon glanced at them. "I'm serious," he said, "Wilson said he needed this information as soon as possible."

"It's different today. The systems are down. Like I said, get in line."

As he stood there, thinking through his options, the policeman stood up.

"Yes, yes," Simon held his hands up and moved towards the cramped office, reluctant to join the throng.

"Don't worry, nothing is happening fast today," said a tall dark-haired man in a suit with his tie loosened. "Wilson is holed up with COBRA anyway. Might as well go home, except I'm paid to be here."

"I couldn't even send him an email," Simon said, "my laptop was playing up."

"Not your laptop, mate. Nothing's working. Best to think low-tech if you ask me."

"What is happening?"

"It's this Error 404 group, isn't it," said another sandy-haired man with sharp features, who looked like he'd spent the night in the room, "causing all kinds of havoc. Scary how quickly everything falls apart."

"But I thought they just had a thing about religion? What's that got to do with politics or the city infrastructure?"

"It's the viruses. They've sent crawlers, spiders, throughout every system we have, erasing anything that mentions God, Jesus, the Bible, the lot."

"Yeah, but this is government, politics, what does that have to do with religion?"

"Have you read a policy document, a bill or a statute lately? Not to mention the Constitution? They all mention the man upstairs. Probably because they're all so old. Mainly concerning royal assent, the House of Bishops and so on. So they've all been wiped. No-one can get it back. Servers have completely crashed too. The only stuff we've got left is on paper."

Derridge would have sat down if there was a seat. He couldn't quite understand it. How could such a little thing like a command carried out by a virus to wipe out the name of God have this effect?

"Is there any way to get it all back?"

This was a conversation that the people in this room had had several times already. They shrugged their shoulders and Derridge realized that Wilson's assignment probably wasn't even important anymore. If wiping out the name of God had this effect, they would soon understand why it wasn't being used in the Coronation service. If that even happened now.

Simon slid down the wall so that he was sitting on the industrially carpeted floor and pulled out a flowery notelet. He quickly jotted down the five objections, added his name and slid the card into an envelope. It smelt faintly of lavender. Sealing it with a quick lick of his tongue, he wrote Wilson's name on the front and got up.

"Good luck," he said to the rest of the room and left, putting the letter onto the secretary's desk, "could you make sure this gets to the desk of the Deputy Prime Minister?"

The secretary looked at him suspiciously, put on a cotton glove and passed the card to the policeman. "Another item to scan, please," she said, as he turned and left, heading back to his desk in Whitehall.

Back in Daran Garayan's office, there were fewer people but an equal sense of pandemonium.

"You're late!" snapped an intern as he walked in, "Garayan wants to see you."

"Where is he?"

"With McNeish."

Derridge headed to the Minister's office via his desk where he dropped off his coat and bag, trying to avoid looking like he'd only just walked in. A package the size of a large shoebox sat in front of his now-useless work computer. He paused, puzzled and looked at it more closely. It had his name, department and a courier sticker on the front. The box was branded with the British Library logo.

"When did this arrive?" he asked out loud to no-one in particular. No-one answered. He began opening it and found that it contained three books and a folder of newspaper cuttings in individual plastic pockets.

"Derridge!" Garayan exploded next to him, "where have you been?"

"Wilson's office," he said, almost dropping the books but deciding not to be apologetic. "He asked me for some information and I thought that…"

"Why didn't you let us know you'd be late? Have you any idea how much we've got to get through today?"

"Nothing seems to work. Sorry." He followed his boss, still holding the folder.

The oversized TV screens in the office still rolled with the same shots of the overnight destruction but now they were accompanied by scenes lit by daylight. Derridge thought again of Henry, working late, caught by an

explosion that wasn't meant to take human life. As he hurried into McNeish's office, still holding the contents of the delivered package, he realized that Summers could only have sent it the night before, just after he had left.

"We're to continue with preparations for the Coronation procession," said Garayan without taking any notice of him, "The Palace and the PM agree that this current crisis cannot get in the way of it. So we need an update from everyone about where we're up to. Ketwick, you go first. Policing."

A bland, nervous intern pushed his hand through his unkempt hair and the meeting of facts and numbers began. Simon zoned out. If he was asked, he could give the information that was needed. He used the time instead to lean back in his chair and flick through the cuttings folder that Summers had sent him as if surveying information relevant to the meeting.

The first thing he noticed that the dates were all leading up to and past the last Coronation. He relaxed, hoping that in some way, Summers had been kind enough to provide him with information relevant to his task. The dates stretched between 1947 and 1954 and were from different publications, mainly Israeli, British and American. But they weren't about the Coronation. Instead, they all covered another topic, the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls. He remembered Henry's excitement when he'd talked about them at the British Library yesterday.

Phrases were highlighted in the clippings, jumping out at him as he scanned through them.

1947: "The greatest manuscript discovery of modern times!...Not the slightest doubt in the world about the genuineness of the manuscript."

1948: "The first three works are under the care of St. Mark's Monastery in Jerusalem where they have been photographed."

1949: "Regional turmoil leads Syrian Archbishop Samuel to smuggle his precious four Scrolls out of the country, relocating them to a Syrian Church in New Jersey."

1954: "Samuel places the same four Scrolls up for sale in a Wall Street Journal advertisement. Yigael Yadin, son of Professor Sukenik, purchases the four Scrolls through an American middleman, on behalf of the State of Israel."

"Simon?" Garayan glared at him.

"Yes?"

"Parks information?"

"Yes, Sir, of course," he quickly sat up, easily recalling his notes, "Green and St James will be on the route from Buckingham Palace to Westminster Abbey. Parks authorities are drafting volunteers for clean-up because of the geese."

"Geese?"

"Yes, the Canada Geese. They will be returning from their migration and beginning to nest. The mess that they produce on the lawns and paths needs to be dealt with so that the large numbers of people expected for the Coronation can use all areas without slipping around on it."

There was a pause, in which Garayan seemed to assess whether or not Simon was playing with him. It's just like the Coronation meeting at the palace, Simon thought. He's panicking. He thought of Henry's thoughtfulness in sending the box, of the books that were still lying on his desk.

When six o'clock came around, the meetings had dried up and little more could be done without access to their systems.

"Pub?" asked one of the other interns, a girl with a slightly pointy nose and green eyes.

"No, not tonight…" Derridge replied, heading back to his desk, hoping to get some time on his own, dampening the guilt that he felt by reading the books from the British Library.

"Suit yourself."

He wasn't a big reader as a rule. Crime fiction, thrillers, sure but nothing literary or classic. There were three books here and they all looked a little dull. Still, there must have been a reason for sending them, like Henry thought he would convince him of something. He slipped them into his bag with the folder of clippings and shoved the empty box underneath his desk before leaving the office and striding out into the fresh evening air. The street lamps showed a drizzle in the air which he felt seconds later on his face. Maybe he would go to a pub after all, somewhere he could sit in the corner and read without being disturbed. He had turned North on Whitehall and was heading towards Trafalgar Square, recalling the large bookshop at the end of the Strand that he had ducked into on another rainy day fairly recently. There were armchairs in there and he wouldn't have to buy a drink.

Perfect. He sank into a welcoming armchair, pulled out the books and began to read.

Chapter 14 1947 Sulenik

The first book that he looked at was about New Testament documents, one by Henry himself about the Sinai Codex and another which, like the clippings, was about the Dead Sea Scrolls. He flicked to a chapter somewhere around the middle and began to read.

Eleazar Sulenik put the phone down in a state of shock. He stood for a few minutes, looking out of the window of his family home in Jerusalem, blind to the British armored trucks and lorries that continued to trundle past.

He felt a touch on his arm. "What is it, dear? Is it about the vote?" his wife asked, fraught with anxiety from the months of tension that were building up to the deadline that had haunted them all. The day when the British wanted to end their mandate to govern Palestine. She was consumed with worry about the UN vote happening in just five days, wondering what it would mean for their future. Would they be able to stay? While they waited, their home town of Jerusalem had become a war-zone, filled with booby-traps,

bombs and quickly erected partitions covered with barbed wire, with British soldiers desperately trying to keep the peace between the factions.

Sulenik shook his head, "it's not about that," he reassured her, hardly able to breathe with excitement. The man who he had just been talking to on the phone was a middle-man, the Armenian representative for a Palestinian Arab antiquities dealer called Faidi Salahi. The Armenians, with their social and economic links with both Arabs and Jews, were often involved in brokering deals between the two nationalities. His reason for calling had left the Jewish Professor with his heart in his mouth.

"Darling," he said, only now able to begin to speak, "something has been found. Something that could be extraordinary."

Chassia shook her head. She had seen this look before and part of it filled her with pride. The other part terrified her. How many times would she be left at home while Elezar headed off to yet another archeological site to find some bright new star for the Jewish people? True, he usually found something spectacular. She didn't have to be reminded of his talent and brilliance, honored throughout the important countries of the world by degrees and doctorates in Berlin, the United States and beyond. But this was her husband, the man she loved, the father of her wonderful grown-up sons and the dangers out there could hardly be more threatening than they were right now.

"I've heard rumors," Sulenik said, distracted, as Chassia sat him at the table, preparing tea for him, trying to calm him down, "the black market has chattered at me about these things but a whole scroll? It cannot be true. I'm sorry but I have to check it out. I have made an appointment."

She tried to stop him and his sons, prompted by their mother, phoned to try and persuade him that it wasn't worth it. Sulenik ignored them and the next day made his way through the city to the gate enabling access to Military Zone B where the Armenian had arranged to meet him. Although they could identify each other through the partitions, neither man was allowed to pass through to the other side.

"Show me the find!" Eleazar shouted as they indicated a point down the barbed wire fence where they could talk without interruption. His contact tripped and ran as he followed Sulenik's instructions, finally able to hold up the strips of manuscript that he had been able to bring for the professor's examination.

Sulenik was wrapt, peering as closely as he could at the darkened leather through the wire, easily making out the Hebrew writing. It wasn't recent, far from it. He recalled the work he had done amongst ancient Jewish burial grounds in recent years. The osseries, holding the bones of God's promised nation, were inscribed with writing like this. It would be missed by someone untrained in these matters but Sulenik instantly knew that other expert paleontologists would agree with him; this writing originated from the pens of scribes two thousand years ago. It was the real deal.

He tried not to show his enthusiasm but he found it impossible to calm his breathing, "where is the rest?" he asked, worried that others in earshot might get wind of what was happening.

"In Bethlehem!" the Armenian shouted before Eleazar gestured at him to lower his voice, "Salahi has three scrolls like this. They are big, too, and complete. If you can come and see them there, maybe you will have the chance to buy them?"

Sulenik looked hopelessly at the metal partition in front of him, the wire glinting in the winter sun. He knew that a trip to Bethlehem would be dangerous, that travel warnings were in place and that Chassia and his son would tell him not to go.

But he had to.

A few days later he had applied for a obtained a pass that allowed him to travel to Bethlehem to meet Salahi.

"Tell me how these came to you," he said, before even stepping across the threshold of the Arab's home. Salahi welcomed him and while they were brought refreshments, led him to a table in another room where the scrolls lay on pieces of linen cloth.

"Bedouin," he said with a shrug of his shoulders, "they know a quick buck when they see one. I often get them coming to me with bits of this and that but when I saw these, I knew they were different. I knew that the Hebrew University would want to see them."

Sulenik washed and dried his hands using the water and towels provided before gently unwrapping the surprisingly tough leather scroll.

"I nearly didn't get these." Faidi laughed, "they went to the Syrian Orthodox merchant first. You have heard of him maybe, a Syrian called Kando? A couple of months ago, he took some scrolls to the Church of St Mark right here in Bethlehem but the monks sent him away at first, not realizing what they were being offered. Eventually, they bought them but it surprises me. That Mar Samuel, the Archbishop himself, does not seem to appreciate the importance of what he is being offered. Did you know he was once a librarian at Saint Catherine's of Sinai? Can you believe it?"

Sulenik gave a cynical laugh, "Those monks hardly have a good reputation when it comes to preserving important ancient manuscripts." He frowned, barely concentrating on anything else as he unfurled and examined each of the three scrolls in turn.

"Yes," Salahi grinned, "Tischendorf tried to tell us that when he 'stole' the Codex Sinaiticus one hundred years ago. How I would have loved to see that come onto the antiquities market!"

"That ship sailed before the war," Sulenik sniffed, "Stalin sold it to the British. So you'll have to be satisfied with going to London and looking at it behind glass at the British Museum like everyone else."

"There are still parts of it out there, though," said Salahi grimly, taking off his glasses, trying not to let his excitement about the manuscripts get in the way of his manners, "they say it's not complete. Not like the Codex Vaticanus. I'm just waiting for some pages of Greek Uncial script to float into my shop. Christians will love it. Then I'll have something I can sell to the British."

"Maybe the academic world should have given Tischendorf more credit. Maybe he did find it in a wastepaper basket ready to be burnt. If Mar Samuel didn't know what he was dealing with, those Saint Catherine's monks can't be that knowledgeable after all."

"Well, I'm glad they came to you instead."

"They almost didn't. Do you know that the shepherds who found them first wanted to make sandal straps out of the scrolls? They only stopped because the leather wasn't strong enough! They let their children play with them for heaven's sake! We are fortunate that someone in the family needed some cash and brought them to market."

"So what else is out there?"

"The archbishop got the first three scrolls and some Bedouin who didn't realize that I would pay more sold him another one about three weeks ago. I'm almost certain that there will be more. What do you want to do with these? Will the university buy them?"

Sulenik smiled a broad smile, relaxing into his chair and rubbing his eyes with the palms of his hands, replacing his glasses with a flourish. "Give them to me for three days for further examination. If they are as genuine to me then as they are now, you'll get your payment."

After shaking hands, Sulenik returned to his home in Jerusalem without further mishap, despite a journey on a bus from Bethlehem to Jerusalem, filled with Arabs, during which he stood clutching the loosely wrapped package of documents that would confirm to the world that his religion was built on the beauty of enduring truth, on the foundation of many thousands of years of historical repute.

A few nights later, he was examining the scrolls further while listening to the radio as the votes from the United Nations came in. Alphabetically, the convenor called for votes from every representative. Chassia noted down each vote in a column. For, against, abstention. They needed thirty-three percent for the State of Israel to be created. The vote was 33 to 12. They would be staying.

The sounds of joy and exultation could be heard throughout their neighborhood as every family listening to the news poured onto the streets and began a long night of celebration.

Eleazar Sulenik was not among them. The joy in his heart was reserved for the find that he was now making certain, his hopes rooted in the positive momentum that would be gained because of these tatty old pieces of leather.

"The Hebrew University will buy the scrolls," he told Salahi. "Now let us find out what else there is out there!"

Simon looked at his watch. It was past nine o'clock and the bookshop was closing. He scratched his head, wondering if Wilson had read his note by now and feeling rather foolish that he could ever have been interested in the Deputy PM's assignment.

He suddenly wanted to talk to his parents, who he'd ignored for the past couple of months under the guise of being too busy to call. Maybe he was, but he felt with a sudden lurch that family was of course more important than his career. He had become a stereotype. Work had completely dominated everything he'd done for the past years. He'd been unable to think about anything apart from this intern program and all it had demanded of him, all it had promised. He thought he was doing the right thing by going all out and getting the precious place that would determine his future. Before that it had been all about getting the right degree at the right University and before that he would have done anything to make sure that he got great grades in his exams.

He folded the dust jacket of the book around the page he had stopped at and as he did, a receipt fluttered out, as though it had been used as a bookmark and then forgotten. Picking it up, he saw that it was from a bookshop in Cambridge. Dated a few years back. It had something written on it in biro. A symbol of some sort l.

Simon shrugged and put it into the place where he had stopped reading. He switched his phone back on, having ignored it since this morning. The messages pinged in as he walked out of the bookshop and headed towards the bus stop. Then he stopped in his tracks. There was one from Wilson.

Sorry not to have caught you today. Great job - PR on the case. Stand by for the next assignment. GW

His heart beat through his chest and he felt slightly sick once again. What would the next assignment be? He realized that his contact with Henry and these books about the scrolls had affected his mindset more than he was willing to admit. He couldn't get away from how these representatives of three major world religions all seemed to agree on something. Summers the Christian, Sulenik the Jew and the Arab dealer Salahi. They all got excited about the past, the part of the history that proved it wasn't all made up.

Their faith and hope and work seemed to grate with the ambitions that he had seen in Wilson. Simon closed his eyes as he stood on the dark, rainy London street. Twenty-four hours ago, he would have been able to walk into a museum to see what had made them all so happy. Now, those documents that they had spent so much time preserving were gone, blown into tiny bits, never to be recovered. The British Library, the Shrine of the Book in Jerusalem, not to mention all those other places that Summers had listed with such passion. All of them, gone.

He was too late.

Chapter 15 Day 3, University Library

Come to the office tomorrow. Another job. GW.

Simon wondered if Wilson had let Garayan know that he needed extra time to work for him. He didn't want a showdown with the boss. More importantly, he didn't appreciate the idea of getting a negative recommendation when he finally went for a fully-paid job in the service.

"Come in, don't worry, I'm not going to eat you."

Simon wondered if Wilson was misreading skepticism for fear. "Sir, I'm not sure if…"

"Right, right, now this next thing is a bit trickier. Listen carefully because you must not write any of it down."

"Sir, I don't think that I…"

"Nonsense, this is right up your street. You're going to progress far in this game, Derridge, I know it. Right, you're fully aware that the group behind the bombs has called themselves Error 404?"

Simon sighed, nodding, having failed to make his point.

"Okay. Now, the intelligence agencies are picking up chatter about a group that we are still trying to understand, a group called the Logos. They think that they might be working with Error 404 although it's not clear how. Might be logistics, or communications or even finance? You seem to have a talent for getting close to the action. Find out who the Logos are - get me names, associates and addresses. I think they are giving Error 404 money but I don't know who they are."

"Does Garayan know that I'm working for you?"

"That man knows nothing, he's a complete waste of space!"

Simon flinched, "can I tell him that you are tasking me with this?"

"No. There are only a few people I trust and you're one of them. Don't tell him. If there's anything you can tell me, do it directly, phone this number." He passed a small business card across the desk with a six-digit number on it, nothing else.

Simon left the office in a daze. What had he done to make Wilson latch onto him like this? He'd never heard of the Logos and had no idea where to start looking for them. He guessed that Wilson expected something a bit more than a quick web search. Someone could have done that already.

He returned to his desk in Whitehall, intending to take a closer look at the books Henry had sent. His book on the Sinai Codex was full of beautiful images of yellow parchment with dark brown strokes marking out some sort of ancient Greek script. The chapters outlined the finding of the manuscript at Saint Catherine's Monastery in Sinai.

Two things made Simon stop and think.

Firstly, that Sinai monastery, was that the same one mentioned in the conversation between Sulenik and Salahi when they were talking about the Syrian Archbishop?

Secondly, and more importantly, the Greek script featured the same symbol scrawled on the receipt l. He turned to an index containing a Greek alphabet. The name of the symbol was lambda. The Greek name of our letter L. He looked back at the Dead Sea Scrolls book and found the receipt again. This time he realized that the l was positioned carefully next to a name printed on the receipt.

Today you were served by Arthur l

Was the l linked with him in some way? Could this Arthur tell him what the l symbol meant?

He was clutching at straws, needing something to follow as a clue. He rubbed his eyes and searched for the bookshop on the freshly re-booted and now-functioning computer systems. The bookshop was located at Cambridge University. When he looked at the buildings and departments around it on his map app, he saw that the department of Divinity was one of them. He typed in a further search for the department but nothing came up. Must be riddled with wiped words that no longer worked because of Error 404. It seemed highly likely that Henry Summers would have visited the Divinity department at Cambridge University.

It was his only lead. He put in an absence notice and booked a train ticket to Cambridge. He reached the bookshop by taxi from the station just before it shut. When he asked for Arthur at the counter, he got a blank look from the young student who just wanted to finish the day.

"Haven't been here long. Ask the manager."

"And the manager would be?"

The student indicated an overweight man in a creased white shirt and spotty blue tie who was arranging books back into straight lines with sighs of exasperation.

"Excuse me?" Simon saw the white name badge. Frederick.

Frederick gave him a look of slight annoyance. "Sorry to disturb you," Simon said, trying to dampen the sarcasm that he felt, "but I'm wondering if a past employee still works here, a man called Arthur?"

Frederick swallowed and got something down his windpipe, coughing and spluttering for a moment and trying to regain his composure. "Arthur?" he asked, frowning, as though the name had caused no reaction whatsoever, "yes, had an Arthur working here, yes, but he's moved on. Works at the University Library. Although…" he cleared his throat.

Simon reflected, wasn't the Cambridge Library on the list of targets?

"Was he hurt?" he asked urgently, suddenly caring about this man who he'd never met.

Frederick shrugged with a mournful look. "I wouldn't know. I'm not in touch with him. Might be someone down the museum who could tell you… it was only a few of the rooms that were hit, though, I'm sure he'll be fine. At night, anyway, wasn't it?"

"Let me guess," said Simon, "the rooms they hit were the ones displaying the ancient Greek manuscripts, mainly Biblical?"

Frederick narrowed his eyes. "What do you want with Arthur?" he asked.

Simon sighed and pulled out his Civil Service swipe card on its lanyard with its fancy insignia.

Frederick nodded, "thought so," he said importantly, "tell Arthur I said hope he's doing okay. I know he always had a bit of a thing for Bible stuff. Kept inviting me to his church and that. Quite a relief when he left."

Simon thanked him and left, the bored student following him to the door and pushing up the bolts to prevent anyone else from coming in and keeping him there any longer than he had to.

The museum was closed now too, so Simon found a cheapish Bed and Breakfast just outside the city center for the night, hoping that he could claim this and the taxi rides on expenses and wishing he had checked with Wilson. Otherwise, how was his intern allowance meant to cover it?

The next morning, he wolfed down the full English breakfast on offer and called yet another taxi to take him to the University Library.

"Gonna have to drop you here," the driver grunted as they turned into a street filled with cordons and diversions.

Derridge got out, picking his way towards the library, hoping that he wouldn't be stopped. Although it was now a few days after the event, the surrounding area had not yet recovered. The town was still reeling from the explosion, although the facade of the library itself seemed intact. A couple of policemen in high-vis jackets stood with their arms crossed by the rotating door and Simon approached them, pulling out his lanyard.

"I'm looking for a possible victim of the blast," he said importantly.

"There's a hotline," one of them said, not even looking at him but tipping his head towards a poster on the window beside him, "No-one died, you know."

"Is there someone in charge here, a Detective Inspector?"

A walkie talkie crackled into life. "DI Foley? Civil service has turned up."

Derridge was impressed. The man hadn't even looked at his badge. More crackling.

"Go on in."

Pushing through the rotating door, Simon entered a busy foyer.

"Intelligence detail, right?" A small grey-haired man passing with a tablet half looked up at him with a voice that was trying to whisper.

"Erm," he didn't know what to say, bewildered by the assumption, "are you, Foley?" Derridge found himself speaking quietly, trying to match his tone.

"Yes, good to see you at last," said the DI, relaxing and holding out his hand to shake Simon's, "So, what do you think?"

Simon frowned. "About what?"

"The breach? We've been waiting since yesterday for advice from a liaison officer but there's been nothing. I need to know what level of clearance I should apply. I automatically slapped a nil-eyes on it but this whole situation's a mess! All I can say is that I think the reveal is an accident. I don't think they were after the sensitive material and I don't think they realize what they achieved. I think they just wanted to wipe out the Bezae, which would match the intentions for the rest of the attacks."

Simon's mind whirled. What sensitive material was he talking about; should he reveal who he was? Would Wilson want him to go ahead here? As an intern, he shouldn't be viewing anything sensitive without a higher clearance. But Wilson had said quite deliberately that he was different.

There are only a few people I trust and you're one of them.

"Show me what you've got." He said bluntly, hoping that the DI wouldn't see through his bluff. "Then I'll contact the office."

They passed through a doorway scanner and Derridge put his bag on the x-ray belt. The burly security guard waved a wand detector over his body and nodded him through. Foley was faster than he looked and had already rounded a corner down the corridor, forcing Simon to jog after him.

Signs of the blast became more evident as they came to a room festooned with plastic sheeting. The broken masonry and taste of brick-dust floated in the air as they ducked under white and black cordons next to a gaping wide pit around fifteen feet across. Around the edges of the room was evidence

of demolished display cases with scraps of destroyed manuscript cast adrift like dried seaweed on a rocky shore. The blast had removed bookshelves from the walls and scattered ancient volumes around the edge and casting them down into the hole and leaving them hanging off the torn edges, their pages fluttering in the breeze allowed in through the smashed windows.

Simon looked straight down into a blackened room below.

"No-one has seen the bunker yet." Said DI Foyle with a sigh. "I want to get some makeshift flooring in here to hide it but can't trust the workmen. I'd hoped that your office would have tame builders who we could use..." He stopped when his phone began to ring and he looked at the screen with a jump. "Sorry, got to get this. I don't have the code to go down there but you can go ahead. The lift is still working." He moved off back down the corridor in the direction they had come so that he could talk without being overheard.

Simon had to play along, his curiosity aroused. A secret bunker underneath a library was certainly interesting. What was in it?

Foley had disappeared out of sight and Simon edged around the hole to the other side where a featureless lift door presented a keypad and nothing else. He looked at the silver pad. It looked standard, unimpressive, probably hiding a complex set of electronics that would only admit a chosen few into this mysterious room below.

As he stood there, wondering, the triangle above the lift lit up and the doors opened. A large, elderly, wheezing man stood there, holding a bundle under one arm and leaning on a cane to support himself with the other. He had something wrong with his leg.

"Going up?" asked the man, as though it was a normal lift in a normal building.

"Er, no…" said Simon, "I thought that…"

The man looked at him with faint annoyance. "Suit yourself," he said and walked awkwardly past him, turning down the corridor that led away from

the ruined room without a backward glance.

Simon slipped a foot in between the doors as they closed and the doors pulled open again, welcoming him. He entered and looked at the array of buttons for different levels. There were no buttons below ground level, which he was now on. The lift didn't look as though it went down from here, just up. The man must have come down from an upper level. He stepped back outside the lift and looked again at the keypad.

"So what do you think?" DI Foley had finished his call and was hurrying back, calling from the other side of the hole, "can we get this covered over? So I can let people in here again?"

Simon hesitated. "You said that this part of the building is secure?"

"Yes, nil-eyes."

"Is there another entrance? A way that someone could get in from the rear? A fire exit perhaps?"

"Yes, but I've got officers stationed there. No-one coming in or out."

"Could you find out from them if an elderly man with a bad leg has just exited the building? He passed me just now, came out of the lift…"

"Ah," Foley's face collapsed, embarrassed, "yes, of course, the Professor, that's who you saw. No, he doesn't count. He's part of the furniture around here. In fact," it was Foley's turn to look suspicious, "I'm surprised that you were not aware of his presence here. Surely he's a key contact on this matter."

Simon's heart fell. He'd given himself away, why couldn't he stay quiet? Still, he had to try to push the bluff one step further, "Oh he's the Professor!" he said, "he looks so different from the picture I was given - yes, yes, I have his address as my next port of call. In the meantime," he continued, forcing himself to keep going and stepping decisively in the direction that he disappeared, "I'll call HQ and let them know about the best workmen to use for this job. Thanks, Foley, keep up the good work."

He turned on his heel as quickly and officiously as he could and waved a hand in the air in the hope of confirming to the DI that everything was in order.

"Right you are, Sir!" he heard behind him with a trust that made his heart calm down a little, "I look forward to that call."

As he let himself out of the next exit, Simon nodded to the policeman on duty, holding up his badge, which seemed to work so well. "The Professor, I need to catch up with him, which way did he go?"

"His usual route, Sir, back down to his Faculty, over the other side of West Road."

"Many thanks." He didn't ask which Faculty because he already knew which one it must be.

Divinity, the study of Biblical texts.

Chapter 16 Day 4, The Faculty of Divinity

As Simon followed the route that the Professor had taken, he called the direct six-digit number that Wilson had given him.

Phone me when you find something.

The number went to voicemail, "Wilson, it's Derridge here. I'm not sure what I've found but I think I got mistaken for Intelligence, MI5 or something," he looked around, making sure that no-one could hear him. He crossed West Road, hoping the noise of the traffic would protect him from eavesdroppers. "There's a room at the Cambridge University library that got uncovered by the blast of the bomb that went off there. It's a bunker of some sort but I think there's more to it than that. Can you phone me back?"

Ending the call, he reached the pavement on the other side and followed the path indicated by signposts as leading to the School of Divinity. The clamor of the main road faded as he came to the pedestrianized part of the campus.

"Stop right there. Don't turn around."

A shaky but commanding voice held him still and he felt what could be the barrel of a gun pressed against his ribs. No-one else was on the path.

"Professor? I need to talk to you."

"Who were you on the phone to?"

He had heard? Through the noise of the traffic? There must be surveillance of a more advanced kind. There must be others. Simon looked around as far as he dared, searching for others who might be part of this ambush. He couldn't see anyone.

He swallowed, wanting to ask an important question while he still could. He drew a l in the loose dirt at the side of the path.

"What does this mean to you, Professor?" he asked.

For an elderly, injured man, he moved quickly, grabbing Simon's arm and pulling it up painfully behind his back.

"You're working for them, aren't you. For Error 404?"

"What? No! Look, okay, I'm not MI5, not like Foley thought, but I am civil service. I'm working for…"

There are only a few people I trust…

"The government. I'm a civil servant."

"Prove it."

Simon pulled at his lanyard with his free hand, trying to twist it to show his credentials. He had slipped Wilson's card into the plastic envelope of the pass card. "You can phone this number, ask them. I promise it's true."

At that moment, the phone rang in his coat pocket. The Professor reached around, pulled it out and looked at the screen. "Same number. Answer it."

He flicked it onto speaker.

"Great work Derridge. I think you've found their center of operations. I'm coming straight over by helicopter. Should be there in two hours." Wilson's booming voice was unmistakable.

"Sir, whose center? Error 404?"

"No, you fool, The Logos."

The line went dead as the Professor gripped Simon hard and pushed him onto the ground.

"Who was that?"

Simon picked himself up, brushing off dead leaves, irritated by the force of the shove. "The Deputy Prime Minister. He's coming over to expose the Logos and the part they have played supporting Error 404. Are you part of that group, Professor? Is that why you were in the Library? Salvaging something from their mistakes?"

"There's nothing left there, no possibility of identifying any of them." He said, a blank expression on his face. "Even when Wilson arrives, he won't find anything. And you've got it wrong. Logos is not supporting Error 404." He walked a few paces ahead and turned around.

"Why did you draw that symbol on the ground?"

"It meant something to a friend of mine and I'm trying to find out what that was," Simon said.

"What was the name of your friend?" The professor asked.

Derridge shrugged, wanting to trust him. "His name was Summers, Henry Summers."

The old man sighed deeply, "so you'll be traveling to Carbrooke on Friday, then?"

Simon frowned.

"I didn't think so. You're not such a great friend after all, are you, that you're not even going to his funeral?"

Simon sighed, frustrated with his lack of research.

"My name is Professor Daniel Grayson. I was a good friend of Henry's. If you had anything at all to do with him, though, you are in a lot of danger. You'd better come with me before that helicopter arrives," he said, a grim look on his face, "and you've got much less than two hours."

"To do what?" asked Simon.

"To disappear," said Grayson.

"I don't understand," Simon protested. They walked on, side by side, as fast as the Professor's leg would allow, heading for the Divinity Faculty.

"Whose side are you on?" pressed Grayson as they marched, "because you need to be sure." He turned, eyes bright.

"Which is the right side?" Simon asked.

"The side that looks to protect the truth, that guards and keeps it, no matter what the opposition is."

"The side of the Logos?"

Grayson looked at him as they got to a plain wooden door with his name and qualifications on it and nodded. "Yes, the side of the Logos." He said, pushing it open to reveal an office full of books, papers and, stretching across his desk, an ancient piece of parchment shaped like a single wing of an angel. It looked yellowed, with brown writing, like the pictures he had seen in Henry's book.

"Is that a page from the Codex Sinaiticus?" he asked, thinking that he gazed on something destroyed in the British Library bomb.

"No."

Grayson closed the door behind them and busied himself with a filing cabinet, pulling out a drawer and putting the package he had been carrying into it before shutting the drawer and turning the key.

"Right!" he said with triumph, "let's have a cuppa."

He busied himself with a kettle and mugs and before Simon knew it, he held a hot cup of well-brewed Yorkshire tea. It wasn't more than two sips later that he felt deep drowsiness and realized that the Professor had drugged him.

"What will you do with me?" he asked, his lips hardly moving.

"I'm protecting you." the old man said. "Trust me."

Chapter 17 Day 12, Alboran Island

"You gave me quite a thump back there," Brian said, wincing, dramatically putting his hand to the back of his head. "Back there in Cambridge, you should have got rid of me properly, you know?"

Thea felt an intense regret that she hadn't hit him harder with the paperweight back in Cambridge. Two of the other men bound her hands behind her back with a cable tie. She wouldn't have done it though, she couldn't have killed him, despite the part that he had played in her father's death. The rain lashed against her face and the wind drove her hair across her eyes. "What are you going to do with me?"

"Well, we don't need you, Thea. What with the maps from the shop and some clues left in Grayson's office, we knew exactly where to go next. Wow, Alboran. What a dump. Guess no-one will look here for you. I haven't got the stomach for killing you so we'll probably just leave you here to starve."

He gave a signal to the men who brought shovels and a box of explosives. Thea stood to one side, ignored, as they levered their shovels beneath the gravestone that she'd found, prising it up, squelching and straining as the crumbling mess of thin soil scattered into the dry hole below. They toppled the large flat stone onto its side and it cracked as it fell but all eyes were on what had been revealed some twelve feet below. A deep cavity, big enough for a grave.

"What can you see?" barked Brian. The gloom of the rainclouds had taken much of the light and the base of the hole couldn't be seen. A powerful torch beam clicked on and reflected sharp pinpricks of light from the individual raindrops as they fell. As it swept across and down into the hole, they saw what lay below. A dark mahogany chest, sunk into the dry depths of the rock down a shaft that looked natural rather than man-made. Now exposed to the elements, the chest began to gleam with the rain that fell on it, as though it was polished.

"Get down there and bring it up," ordered Brian, a task which Thea thought would be impossible without heavy lifting equipment or some sort of crane. She wanted to get down there herself, to be the first one to open the chest, to see whatever it contained. Jumping would be madness, with that drop. The walls were too sheer to climb down. She looked around for Sadiq. He had disappeared. What had they done with him? She thought of Mariam and Alejandro, hoping that they had found somewhere to hide, hoping that they did not yet know that Sadiq was hurt. Her anger returned, bitter that this family had been drawn into Error 404's plans, plans that hadn't stopped with all the destruction and chaos that they had already achieved.

"There's someone down there!" one of the men shouted. All eyes returned to the cavity, lit by the torch. The chest was moving out of sight. The gunmen instantly lifted their guns to their shoulders waiting for the command.

"Sir, Mr. Truman, Sir?" they asked, their trigger fingers ready.

Brian paused, "We want to destroy it, yes, particularly if it contains the documents we are looking for. But…"

Thea looked at him. His face contained transfixed greed that she couldn't place. He swallowed, whispering so that only she could hear, "if this is the missing part of the Sinai Codex, it will be priceless. Think of its value on the Dark Net. With the rest gone…"

In the time that he paused, hypnotized, the chest below them had disappeared. He cried with horror. "Get down there! Sort it" he yelled, looking as though he was prepared to jump down the shaft himself. This was her chance, the only time, while they were distracted. Thea turned and ran awkwardly, as fast as she could with her hands tied behind her, towards the closest edge of the island, the only possibility she had of getting out of sight. She expected shots at any moment, glancing behind when she dared, her breath rasping and wheezing as she ran for her life. They were not looking at her.

Reaching the edge of the cliff, she dropped down onto a ledge out of sight, her chest heaving, pulling at the wet air for extra breaths and beginning to shiver from fear, longing to push her hand through the hair stuck all over

her face, despairing at her lack of options. She crouched, wanting to look back up and over the cliff towards the grave but terrified of being seen and shot.

It was then that she heard voices below her. She looked down and pressed herself down and back against her ledge as she saw two of the gunmen emerge onto a flat platform of rock above the crashing waves. How was that possible? She held her breath, as though they might hear her in the roar of the sea and the whipping wind. Instead, they turned and disappeared once more.

What was down there? If only she could get rid of the cable tie that bound her hands. It must be a cave system of some sort, tunnels, leading to the cavity where the chest had been hidden. Who was down there? Could it have been the others, Mariam? Alejandro? Frozen from the terror of the attack, she could only hope that they had achieved what she couldn't. Their motives were as strong as hers, after all. If there was more evidence of Musa's writings with Edmund, they would benefit financially from that too. But was it worth all this?

They would rendezvous back at the speedboat, she had to get back around to that side of the island, meet them and get away. She still valued her life more than an old document, however valuable it might be. She wasn't ready to die for it just yet.

Trying to calm herself down, she looked around her to work out the best route back. It meant exposing herself in plain sight on the flat plateau of the island. The rocks, boulders and occasional platforms at this crumpled end did not continue all the way around. Could she use the tunnel system? She shivered, thinking of bumping into the gunmen in an enclosed space, with nowhere to run. Neither option appealed to her.

At that moment there was a massive explosion.

It came from the direction of the helicopter. Without having to move, she could see a plume of black smoke and flame billowing up into the air above her, above the reach of the lighthouse. Daring to stand up enough that she could see what was happening, she realized that the helicopter had

exploded, taking out three of the five gunmen, who now lay lifeless from the blast. That left Brian and two more. Where were they? The plateau seemed clear. This was the moment she had to make a run for it. It was harder than she had expected to get back up with her hands tied but she twisted and urged her body to respond, rolling and crawling back onto the flat ground.

Bent almost double, she began to run towards the lighthouse, her thighs aching and her shoulders sore from the awkward angle of her arms. She visualized the pier below, the little white speedboat bobbing in readiness, waiting for her and the hope of escape drove her on as the helicopter continued to burn like a beacon in the middle of the island, now deserted once more.

Brian was down there somewhere, plus two gunmen. Thea prayed that the others had escaped, that even Sadiq might be alive and safe somehow. She didn't imagine that the chest would be intact by now. They would have opened it, found whatever it was that her father had been searching for, what Grayson was longing might exist. They would have destroyed it, following the demands of their organization.

"Thea!" the shout stopped her in her tracks.

She had got halfway across the open expanse on her way to the lighthouse, the white and yellow tower reaching high above her, offering shelter and a hiding place, as well as a viewpoint from which she could see down to the jetty.

"Thea!" the cry came again, from the direction she was heading in. She spotted Alejandro, his face almost the same chalky white as the base of the lighthouse, and ran towards him.

"Did you see the explosion?" he asked, smiling despite his obvious fear, "that was me! I did that, I found one of their guns and shot out the petrol tank! So much for video games being a waste of time."

Mariam was crouched behind him, crying and shaking.

"Your stupid action will bring an end to all of us," she said, berating him, "and Sadiq has not come back!" she sobbed, "what will they do to him?"

Thea crouched down as Alejandro examined her ties, "that looks painful," he said, before cutting her free, "there you go." She rubbed at her wrists before realizing that the skin was broken and she was just hurting herself even more in the process. Instead, she pulled the cuffs of her raincoat as far as they would go and at last ran her hands through her hair, scooping it away from her face and twisting it behind her head, stuffing it into the back of the jacket as the rain ran down her back under her top.

"Is the boat safe?" she asked, looking around for evidence of Brian and the gunmen and seeing none.

"Yes, look." They all watched as the boat bobbed against the jetty some fifty feet below them.

"They are in the cave system under the island," Thea said, "perhaps they have already opened the chest and destroyed its contents but Sadiq is under there too. He pulled the chest out of sight while we were watching. If he managed to hide when they went down the shaft, he will be fine. If not…"

"We must find him," said Alejandro.

"I will go," said Thea, hardly believing what she was saying. "Go down as close to the boat as you can but stay out of sight, just in case. I will find Sadiq and bring him to you."

Alejandro pressed something into her hands. A torch. "From the boat," he said, "thank you."

It was a wish list, she knew, but now that her hands were free, she felt invincible and she owed it to this family. They had helped her, now it was time to repay them. Mariam grabbed onto her hand, crying some more but Thea smiled as kindly as she could and returned to the ledge where she had been before, running low over the exposed plateau. From there, with her hands free, it was easy enough to climb down to where she had seen the gunmen on the rock platform. There it was, a triangular crack in the cliff

wall, looking like a shallow cave but reaching back further in. She clicked the torch on and it shone a feeble light into the dripping darkness but as soon as she had gone a few meters, the walls became dry to the touch. She could see footprints and scuffs in the dust on the ground and the sound of her footsteps blended with the distant crash of the waves. She stopped and listened. Nothing but her breathing. The air became even cooler as she proceeded, following the twists and turns of the uneven passageway. In places, she moved slowly, wondering how the gunmen had squeezed themselves through the small gaps in the rock. Soon, however, there was a change in the smell to fresher air and the sound of dripping grew louder as she turned a corner to find a shaft of light coming from above. She was at the base of the cavity that they had been looking down upon and she stood in the space that had until a short time ago been shored up, containing the chest that her father had been searching for, that Musa had buried some five hundred years ago. Touching the walls, she realized that the space would have been kept dry all this time. The stone slab at the top had fitted so snugly that rainwater would have been kept out for a long time. It still wasn't perfect though, if any documents were hidden in that chest, it was unlikely that they would have been preserved in these conditions. It was most likely that they would have been reduced to a gelatinous mush a long time ago. Surely her Dad knew that. Why would he still hold out any hope that they would still be intact? She berated herself for not even thinking about that before now. Grayson would also be well-aware of the conditions needed for preservation. Dry, hot, desert conditions were ideal. No-one would go looking for ancient buried parchment on a wet and windy island in the West Mediterranean.

You would go to the desert.

She shivered, feeling the walls of the enclosed chamber close around her as she remembered the aftermath of her brother's disappearance. The clutching claustrophobia of loss and guilt. The smothering grains of sand in her nose and mouth. She felt the same feelings of anger towards her father that had haunted her ever since. Why had he taken them there? Was it a holiday?

And now here she was, because of him.

The crack of footsteps sounded behind her, down another passageway. A nervous shout and semi-automatic gunfire. She had to find another way out, a way past the gunmen.

Reluctant to follow and commit herself to the darkness, she decided to hide instead, waiting, listening, finding a ridge of rock to crouch behind, out of sight of anyone who might come this way.

A few minutes later, someone approached, small and quiet, holding a large weapon.

"Sadiq!"

He jumped with the shock of hearing her voice.

"Thea?"

"You're alive!"

"Are we safe?" she breathed, terrified of being ambushed.

"They're dead, they're all dead, apart from that leader, Brian. He's got the manuscript. He's heading for the boat - it's the only way off the island. I thought I'd try and cut him off, surprise him from another angle."

"Come this way," she said, "I know where to go and Mariam and Alejandro are waiting by the boat."

Sadiq's face contorted in the torchlight. "No, if he sees them he will kill them, he's crazy, he wants the manuscript for himself! We have to stop him."

As they emerged from the side of the cliff and climbed up to the plateau, Thea's heart was in her mouth. Would they get to the boat before Brian? She feared what they might find.

As they neared the lookout point by the lighthouse where they could see the jetty, Thea held back, out of breath and terrified. She couldn't bear to look

but Sadiq went on. "There's no-one there," he said, his face pale from worry.

"Come on, let's get down there and get the boat, now!" shouted Thea as she felt the vulnerability of their position, running down the path that led to the little jetty without looking around her, Sadiq close behind.

Mariam and Alejandro sprang from their hiding place behind the rocks at the base of the cliff and joined them to Sadiq's evident relief as they continued their pace to the boat. Alejandro leaped into the cockpit and found the keys, starting the engine as Sadiq threw his semi-automatic into the back of the boat and unwound the ropes, Mariam clambering into the boat and squatting as low as she could as Thea jumped in after her.

"Stop!" A familiar voice boomed out and gunfire strafed the water beyond the boat. Brian was standing some twenty-five feet away, emerging from a small tunnel in the cliff. Mariam screamed and Thea held her hands over her ears, willing it to stop. The engine continued to turn over but Sadiq stood still, holding the rope, stopping the boat from going.

"He'll kill us all if we don't do what he said," he said quietly, "Turn off the engine, Alejandro."

There was a pause.

"I need that boat!" Brian shouted, shifting a large item under his arm so that he could point the gun with more accuracy, "you take it and you'll all be dead in a few seconds."

"He's got a document!" she hissed, "Sadiq, is it legible?"

"Completely preserved in wax," he said, "a miracle."

Thea eyed the gun from her kneeling position. She would be able to reach it if she just crawled over through the back seats.

"Distract him if you can," she whispered.

Sadiq put his hands in the air and walked down the jetty towards Brian as the retired security guard stumbled over the rocky ground towards it.

"Give me that, I'll help you look after it," Sadiq said calmly.

"I wasn't born yesterday," Brian shouted, nervous and twitchy, "it's doing just fine with me. All of you, hands up - get out of the boat, now!"

Thea had wriggled into the back section of the boat behind the seats. She knew that at this point, she should put her hands up in the air as well but she was so close. She gripped the cold metal of the gun, trying to work out where the safety catch was, unnerved by the weight of it and her unbalanced position as the little boat rocked in the strong swell, cast adrift now that Sadiq no longer held onto the ropes.

"Can you get him from here?" asked Alejandro.

"We cannot get out of the boat, Sir!" shouted Mariam, "it has drifted now, we are too far."

"Bring it back here!" Brian panicked, firing off shots again, letting them ping off the rocks next to the jetty, missing Sadiq by a couple of meters. "Why did you let go of the rope?" he screamed.

"You wanted our hands in the air?" Sadiq offered, completely unnerved.

Thea rested the nose of the gun on the edge of the boat and looked along the barrel, Brian in her sights. As he looked up, she fired, keeping her finger pressed down on the trigger as a hail of bullets ricocheted around the rocks above him. She pulled it the nose down as she saw Brian's reaction, tripping and stumbling towards the jetty, falling through the air, the treasure that he held flying in an arc above him, over him, watching Sadiq's horrified face as it twisted and turned in the air, landing too far to catch hold of, bouncing and skidding off the weathered wooden planks and falling with a solid splash into the salty sea.

No-one spoke. A cry, a sigh, a howl of frustration, came from one or all of them but nothing could reverse the thing that had been done.

Sadiq scrambled to the water's edge, flinging himself into the sea at the place where the document had disappeared and diving down into the water. Brian strafed the boat with automatic fire and Mariam took a bullet, screaming in pain. Alejandro restarted the engine and the boat whirled in the water, disorientating Thea, who crouched, down, knowing what she had to do. She pulled Sadiq in, shaking his head, grasping a piece of sodden and disintegrated parchment which he flung onto the bottom of the boat in disgust.

"There was something else in that chest," he said, "It had more manuscripts in it, they didn't get it all, there was more, hidden in the wax."

"Wax?" asked Thea.

"That's how it was preserved."

Brian was back on his feet, gun pointed straight at them. Thea knew this time that she had no choice. It was him or all four of them. She fired a single bullet at the large figure. He flopped back onto the battered shore, a red bloom erupting from his chest.

There was a moment of stillness in the boat as the waves slapped against the side and Thea decided to take charge.

"More of them will come," she said, "take your family home, Sadiq, get Mariam to a hospital. Then come back for me. I'll find whatever is left buried in the wax in the chest and then we can work out what to do with it. We can make sure we all get what we want."

She saw a flicker of hope pass over Sadiq's face as he looked at Mariam's limp form and at Alejandro bending over her, holding her wound as tightly as he could. "We will be back soon," he said with a grateful grimace, "Take this," he threw her a rucksack with the provisions in it.

Thea jumped out of the boat onto the jetty and turned to see the wave heave white water up through the engine and the nose raise to its quickest speed. She knew that this was the right thing to do.

If there was more in that chest, she had to find it, before Error 404 came back.

Chapter 18 Day 12, The Lighthouse

Although the rain had stopped, the wind was still cold and it would be dark soon. Thea pulled the hood of her borrowed jacket over her head and picked her way over the rocks past Brian's still form towards the entrance to the cave system. Surely it would be the quickest way to get to the remains of the chest.

She clicked on the tiny beam of her little torch. The tunnel was similar to the one she had followed at the other end of the island. It bent around to the right and continued, the floor even in some parts and uneven in others. After about ten minutes, she found what she was looking for. Pieces of a mahogany box, strewn across the tunnel floor. Thea bent down to pick up a shard of the smashed lid, its ornate carving smeared with mud on one side and the sheer, smooth feel of wax on the other. She crouched beside the main rectangular body of the chest, flashing the torch over it to see better. At one end, the wax showed evidence of a frenzied attack that had uncovered a precious treasure, kept safe for centuries. She thought of the mess of ruined pages lying sodden in the bottom of the boat, sloshing below the worrying form of Mariam as they hurried back to Melilla for medical attention. She thought back to Brian's attempt to keep it for himself, of Morrie as she sat at home, doubtless unaware of his whereabouts, not realizing that he was now dead. The guilt began gnawing at her and she recoiled as she remembered how she picked him out with that one shot, the one that left him still on the rocky seashore. Would Morrie ever know it was her?

Shaking her head to keep herself focused, she looked at how the other end of the chest contained dark yellow wax with a smoother surface, unadulterated, beautifully solidified into swirling patterns which might have spun and settled like molten metal before hardening into place five hundred years before. How could she dig further into it? Was she like Error 404? Finding and destroying?

It was then that she saw the corner of a sheet of paper in the far corner, drenched in the wax, making itself known like a little hand sticking above the surface, waving at her. Despite the turmoil of her emotions, Thea's heart leaped with excitement. This must have been what Sadiq had seen when the others had not. There was more here.

Eagerly, she inspected the edge of the paper which revealed legible handwriting, not the formal Greek Uncial font of the Codex. Her heart sank. It wasn't a missing part of the Sinai Codex.

Even so, she delicately chipped away at the thick wax, cracking it off as she attacked it carefully with a table knife from Sadiq's bag of provisions. As she uncovered it, the thick smell of the wax entirely enveloped her, aromatic and powerful. She gradually pulled out a thick wad of pages, loosely bound together with a leather cord through holes down one side. Once she had released them from the wax, she realized that she was holding paper, not parchment, telling her that it was far more recently made than the Sinai Codex. Every sheet had Arabic handwriting on one side and English on the other, written by someone else, in a scratchier pen, with rough diagrams and maps. She suspected that these were the missing sheets of the diary written by Musa during his trip. She focused on the English side and found a quick confirmation of the author.

I, Edmund William Somers, a Knight of the Order of Hospitaliers from Carbrooke, England, do hereby write these words in the fifteen hundred and fortieth year of our Lord.

I recognize now that my time of death is close and I wait to meet Christ my one and only Lord in front of the judgment throne. I place my life in his hands and do entirely confess the extent of my sin, deeply requesting his forgiveness in these final hours. I also ask my dear friend Musa, should he survive similar perils, to forgive me for writing on these pages of his account of our travels. Until now, I have not had the stomach for even holding a pen but I am renewed in strength and purpose now that my valuable cargo may perish with me. If these pages are preserved so that they can be read, it is only by the will of the Most Holy God.

I sit here in the bowels of a foreign ship, realizing that I cannot go home. It is God's will. Not only has he decided that my diseased body is used beyond its capabilities, but he has also chosen to use his instrument of government, King Henry, to persecute my brothers. While I am away from home, I am safe. Yet, what sort of safety is it? Protected by the money and goodwill of a Moslem, carried by the ship devoted to the service of a foreign god, can this truly be called safety? Yet I have with me the most precious cargo which has kept the words of my Lord God with me thus far. These two worthy manuscripts, borne from Saint Catherine's Monastery in Sinai, were not stolen but rather saved for protection. If the reader of these humble words is able, they should by any means possible, attempt to bear this pair of treasures back to that place where they can be reunited with their vast store of brothers. When the time of persecution has passed and King Henry has ceased his war on the holy things of God, envoys should be sent back to Sinai to benefit from them once more.

Thea paused, the implications of Edmund's words sinking in. *Two* manuscripts? They had found only one… everyone had assumed… she looked at the chest of wax, lying there, used, smashed and dug into. Was there enough room in that mess to hide a second document? Putting Edmund's writings carefully to one side, she shuffled on her knees back to the box that seemed to want to continue to give more and more treasures up to her. The light of her torch flickered and she realized that she would need to work quickly if she was going to get this out with the battery life available. The chest was too heavy for her to carry or drag out. The gunmen must have used all their strength to get it this far. Did Musa also have help?

At that point, she remembered the large torch that Brian's men had used to look down the shaft when they first opened the grave. Where was that now? No-one had taken it off the island so it must still be here. How had Brian got back to the entrance? She must have passed it on the way in. By the time she got back, there was barely a glow on the filament of her torch bulb and the light outside had faded dramatically but it was still enough to find their torch. When she had picked it up, found the switch and turned it on, the beam that it projected felt like a lightsaber in its intensity. She swept it back into the cave and made her way back to the chest, thinking excitedly about what she was about to discover.

Reaching the chest, she propped up the torch to give her maximum light to work by. Scraping carefully at what she thought was a thin layer of wax covering the base of the chest, it wasn't long before she had her answer. The plank of wood below it was the wooden covering used to bind another part of the manuscript.

Thea felt a burst of adrenaline as she used the remaining light to uncover it enough to be able to lift the book cover and see a very familiar format, large and clear, with its three columns of uniform writing, beautiful and clear, contrasting in its dark ink against a creamy yellow background, Greek Uncial, the font of the fourth century in Alexandria.

A missing part of the Sinai Codex.

In love, relief, and devotion, she used what remained of her energy to dig the manuscript free. She had beaten Error 404 and won this, owning it, for Dad. This was for him.

Her first instinct was to protect both sets of papers, the Ezekiel manuscript, and the diaries. She wanted to get them into the lighthouse which she hoped would provide them with a more protective atmosphere and where she could examine them more closely. She wrapped them up in her now completely dry raincoat and awkwardly clutched them to herself as she made her way back to the cave entrance by the jetty.

When she stepped back out into the evening air, it had stopped raining and was now almost completely dark. Although she was aware of Brian's body out there, she knew that she could get to the path up to the lighthouse without having to see it before the morning. Placing the precious package under the cover of the lighthouse porch, she walked purposefully over to the smoldering wreckage of the helicopter, looking for a piece of twisted metal to use as a crowbar on the lighthouse door. It still gave off a heat that forced her to stay away and urged her to look for an alternative approach. Glancing around, she saw a glint of metal lying on the scrubby grass. A semi-automatic. After killing Brain Truman, she hadn't wanted to touch another gun again as long as she lived but she pushed her squeamish fears down. This gave her a new possibility of getting into the lighthouse.

Turning back, she looked up at the tower above her. It was a huge municipal structure, raised in the last fifty years for functionality rather than beauty. She lifted the package out of the way of any danger and stood back, shooting determinedly at the lock until the door swung open.

Once inside, she found a light switch and a pale green glow lit the room. She walked through into a large room, set out with a table and chairs, with only a small window looking out over the jetty towards Melilla.

She put the raincoat-covered package onto the table and opened it up, setting the diary apart from the Codex. She would settle to reading it properly as soon as she had found out what this place had to offer her for the night.

In the main room was a sink with taps that ran dry and an old kettle attached to a socket. Further up the stairs, there were two rooms, one containing an old mattress and the other full of broken furniture. She had enough to eat and drink from the rucksack since they had prepared provisions for four people and she had a place to stay that was dry, if not that warm. She could do this for a night or two.

She returned downstairs, lured by the thought of reading through more of Edmund's diaries. She thought again how well the wax had preserved it on this wet island. Had he planned it? She turned the first page and adjusted her position so that her shadow from the weak bulb above her didn't cast a shadow over the writing.

It is hard to express my respect and love for the monks at Sinai. Their efforts to preserve God's holy word are beyond compare. I believe that they will be richly rewarded and given cities of heaven in return for their great work.

My view of the holy things of God extends to respect for the careful sacrifice of those belonging to other religions. In his mercy, he has used their efforts to preserve his message of grace. In Cairo, we sought a place to stay. It transpired that the synagogue Ben Ezra extended care to pilgrims, in the manner of my order. Over a simple meal in the common eating hall of the guesthouse, I learned of the practice of the Genizah. How holy the name of

God is to our Jewish ancestors who take care lest even the written form is damaged or destroyed. They hold Him in such high regard that they cannot bear to see a mistake made with even a nomina sacrum. When I asked further about it, I was taken to a high whitewashed wall in the synagogue with a ladder against it, leading to a small opening. When I was encouraged to climb it, I found myself looking into a dark room without windows or doorway that housed the unending sheaves of paper. When I descended, I was told that every time a mistake is made, it cannot be destroyed but is rather put here. Later, Musa and I wanted to view the documents within. We ascended the ladder once more and found that we could go down into the darkened room. We lit a torch and pulled out parchments written hundreds of years before, bearing the words of God's holy scriptures in Hebrew. Not knowing this language, I could not tell what was written on it but I chose a paper with neat, well-formed lettering on it and put it together with my possessions so that I might seek out a translation later.

Later, however, I felt my conscience cry out against my actions. I went to the chief Rabbi and asked for his forgiveness. He explained with generosity in his spirit that they regarded these documents as corpses who have lost their souls. They must be protected from abuse in the same way that human bodies are put in the grave to protect them. To my surprise, he honored me by offering that I could keep the document, believing that I would protect it and not destroy it. I asked for a translation. It is from the psalms and once he began to recite it, I recognized it instantly as the words that had fortified me during my fast in the cave on the holy mountain.

"He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High

Will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.

I will say of the Lord, "He is my refuge and my fortress,

My God, in whom I trust."

She continued to read;

Due to the ongoing pricking of my conscience, railing against my decision to take these manuscripts away from their homeland, I showed the Rabbi the two books of scriptures that we carried, looking for guidance regarding my actions without articulating my fears. An answer was given, firstly considering their ambivalence towards the translated nature of scripture from Hebrew into Greek, which they deeply disagree with and secondly, when they objected strongly to one of the pages that presents a clear fingerprint smudging the ink of some Greek characters. If it was written in Hebrew, they said, they would keep it indeed, insisting that it should rest in the genizah as it was imperfect. The word of God as it came to them in the Hebrew language is held up so high that the labors of men in repeating their tasks are nothing in comparison to the honor due to the holy expression of God.

Thea stopped reading, trying to remember. Was Cairo on the list of Error 404 targets? Had it been attacked and the contents destroyed? She felt hope return. Perhaps this synagogue still had this immense collection of biblical documents. She imagined Grayson's reaction. What would he say? Did they know about it already? Were the Logos there, protecting it?

She turned next to the older document, opening the clasps on the large wooden cover, folding it back against the binding that had fared so well during its five hundred years under wax, still cracking off with sweet and spicy aromas every time she loosened a page from the one next to it. The pages were vellum, smooth and stiff, the beauty of their precise Greek text standing out in its regularity. She smiled as she recognized words emerging from the continuous lines of letters. Dad had done a good job with her, she realized. Their lessons in ancient Greek had not been her favorite pastime but she had loved sitting with him as he showed her the patterns of verbs, the changing endings of nouns depending on their usage. She'd always found languages easy. French, Spanish, Latin, maybe because of the understanding he had given her, underpinning how they worked. Dad wanted her to learn Hebrew and Aramaic too, but she'd resisted. Something she regretted now, thinking that Musa's writings on the back of Edmund's diary pages might have been of some use to her if she'd been able to interpret them.

She thought of Edmund, of his wish for whoever found it to take these two manuscripts back to the monastery at Sinai, to be restored to the rest of the document to make a whole. This heavy, rather ugly, crudely bound manuscript needed her protection and she decided right then that she would not take it to Europe. It had nothing to reunite to, after all. Instead, she would make sure that it got to Sinai unharmed.

She found it ironic that she needed to protect it now when it had survived in a deeply inclement climate since 1540. She regretted chipping away at so much of the wax. This natural covering had given it all of the protection it had needed, rivaling the cleverly regulated atmospheres of the Cambridge Library and the British Library, neither of which had been any use in the end.

She began to decipher and interpret the words of the text in front of her. Grayson had said that Dad was looking for a part of the Codex missing until now. She believed that it sat in front of her right now. She knew that chapter and verse numbers had been added to the Bible later. This copy was too early to have those inserted.

And you, take up a lamentation for the princes of Israel, and say what was your mother? A lioness. Among lions, she crouched, amid young lions she reared her cubs. And she brought up one of her cubs and he became a young lion and he learned to catch prey. He devoured men. The nations heard about him he was caught in their pit and they brought him with hooks to the land of Egypt.

Thea felt her stomach chill. Her mother was a lioness who had raised and protected her son. And he had perished in the land of Egypt. She stood up suddenly, unable to breathe. How was it that this was the first thing that she had read for days, why did it have to be these words that confronted her as she first decided to translate this text? Her father had always gone on about the Bible as the Word of God. How it was different from any other book in the world because it dealt with your heart and not just with your mind. He hadn't been able to get her to read it for herself in English all those years and now she was here, having her heart challenged by it as she read it in ancient Greek.

They brought him with hooks to the land of Egypt.

She couldn't read anymore. She could hear a new storm lashing its way in through the lighthouse door and onto the tiny windows as she passed them on the stone staircase, winding round and round up to the top. She reached a door which she thought at first must be locked but when she hit her shoulders against it a couple of times in frustration, she realized that it was just stuck, perhaps through lack of use. She burst through onto a view that she felt made this whole thing worthwhile once again, just for a little while.

The vast panorama of the sea and sky that lay before her brooded a dark blue, black and white. The clouds billowed like bags of soot with misty grey curtains of rain raging torn and undisciplined beneath them while the sea beneath heaved with restless, sharp peaks of foam crests, angry and defiant, waging war on the jetty which now looked inaccessible and unsafe.

Thea felt at once exposed and protected behind the strengthened glass, removed from the wild world outside, yet still imprisoned by it. She instantly relished the danger of it. This was her exile. It seemed that, just like Ezekiel by the banks of the river, seeing great visions of destruction in the clouds above and on the plains before him, she was realizing that she wasn't the center of the universe, that she wasn't in control.

The weather would prevent Sadiq from returning immediately. She would need to get used to this for a few days.

Chapter 19 Day 16, Partnership

Simon Derridge hauled himself up the slippery ladder, hoping that he would make it to the rail in time, his rebellious stomach twisting in pain. The pitching boat dived down another endless slide and his hands gripped the side rails as he hurled the remains of his breakfast onto the deck, rather than into the churning grey depths.

'Go back! Down!' the skipper bellowed at him from the little covered wheelhouse, scarcely audible above the storm as Simon gave another retch

before holding one hand up in confirmation and slithering back into the cabin below.

No-one knew where he was. Garayan, Wilson, the other interns, not a clue. They needed not to know, at least until he'd followed the instructions of a man he trusted more than any of them. Professor Grayson.

The events of the last couple of weeks had turned everything he knew upside down. First the meeting at the palace, then the special assignment from the Deputy PM; being asked to disprove the reliability of the Bible, the task that sent him to the British Library where he met Henry Summers and got whisked through Bible transmission 101. Then there were the books he had been sent and the new assignment, the receipt sending him to the bookshop in Cambridge, the exposed bunker in the University Library, the accidental discovery of Professor Grayson.

Who had then drugged him.

He had woken up in a hostel for the homeless in Inverness, Scotland. He wasn't sure how much time had passed and no-one knew who he was. He had no identification on him, just a down payment for his room for the next month. They told him that the clothes he had turned up in were dirty, stained and needed cutting off, that his breath had stunk of alcohol and his hair was unkempt and filled with dirt. He couldn't possibly be a civil service intern, they told him, because all the signs pointed to someone who hadn't had a decent shower for months.

Completely disorientated, Simon had remembered the Professor's words.

I'm protecting you…trust me.

It turned out that those were the last words Grayson said to him. When he'd calmed down and made his first phone call to the Cambridge School of Divinity, he discovered that the Professor had been shot and killed in his own office.

You have to disappear.

Derridge thought of his parents, then of Wilson, then of Garayan back at the Whitehall office. His parents probably wouldn't even notice that he hadn't called for a while. Garayan would be angry that he hadn't turned up for work.

Wilson. Grayson had not trusted Wilson. After hearing Simon's short exchange with Wilson on the phone, he had urged him to disappear.

He had no idea why.

Then the hostel had given him an envelope containing a false passport with his photo in it, a plane ticket to Malaga and the print-out of an email from the Professor, instructing him to go to Alboran, where he would find Henry Summers' daughter, Thea, who would tell him more about the Logos.

He had nothing else to do. He had disappeared, after all.

He swallowed as the boat lifted suddenly, tasting acid from between his teeth as he tried to turn on the narrow bench that ran alongside the fixed cabin table, holding onto the ridge that ran around its edge to stop things from sliding off. He'd give anything to be on dry land right now.

When he'd looked it up, he found out that Alboran was a tiny island in the middle of the Mediterranean between Spain and Melilla, some sort of Spanish enclave. He had no idea why Henry Summers' daughter might be there.

So that was how he came to be on this little Spanish boat, his insides killing him as they pitched and tossed around an angry sea.

A few hours later, the captain hailed him with a joyful shout.

'There it is!' He shouted, 'Your island, Alboran!'

Simon's nausea halted for a couple of seconds as he raised his head above the deck and saw the squat little piece of land on the heaving horizon, a lighthouse picked out against the dark sky. Then he threw up over the rail again.

As soon as they docked at the little jetty on the south side of the island, he leaped off the boat and lay down on the weathered wooden planks, breathing slowly, trying to get his sense of balance back while the solid earth still bucked and buckled beneath him.

'No sailor, no?' laughed the captain, looking up at the lighthouse and back out across the sea at the cloudscape before them. 'So how long you want to stay here? We need to go soon to reach home before dark.'

'Okay,' Simon said, trying to think, realizing how tiny this island was and how few its inhabitants were. He would find her in no time, 'Not long.'

Simon dreaded the journey back and tried to clear his mind of it. Perhaps it would be calmer and there would be flatter seas? He looked hopefully up to the sky and fancied he could see a much lighter patch further south. Was that even blue sky? It could open up a great deal in an hour, couldn't it? Weather systems do that, don't they? He thought desperately.

Better get on with it, finding this girl, or woman, or whoever she was. He realized that his arrival was hardly stealthy. She had probably already seen him coming. He looked up at the lighthouse and thought he saw a shadow at the lowest window. Was it her? Or a lighthouse keeper of some sort? He'd done a bit of research which told him that it was all automated these days, leaving the island deserted apart from a yearly maintenance check and the odd refugee boat.

He walked up the path that led to the top of a small cliff but just as he cornered the top to reach the lighthouse he saw the ruins of something melted, bulbous in form, with crumpled blades, looking as though it might once have been a helicopter.

He wished he could reach for a weapon, pull it out and hold it shoulder-high for protection. When he got to the porch, he saw that the door had been forced open, probably with a semi-automatic. Maybe that weapon was still inside.

'Hello?' he called, as loudly as he dared.

A movement on the stairs above him confirmed that his presence had been noticed.

'Miss Summers, is that you?'

A long silence passed. He tried again. "My name is Simon Derridge. I need to talk to you, please. I work for the Civil Service, although… well, I'm here because Professor Grayson sent me. He said you could tell me more about the Logos…'

"You're lying." Her strong voice rang down, bouncing down the curved stone walls. "I've got a gun, you know." He knew that already.

"I'm not lying," he said, trying not to let the nerves show in his voice, "the professor trusted you and I think he trusted me too. It's just hard to know what's going on now that he's dead."

'You're one of them, though, aren't you,' she said.

He wracked his brains, 'one of who?'

'Error 404.'

"No. I am not. Although I'm starting to wonder about some of the people I've been working with."

She was suddenly standing there, small, auburn hair around a pale face, huddled against the wall, her hands pointing something at him that did indeed look like a fairly vicious semi-automatic. "So Grayson trusted you did he?"

"Yes," he couldn't help pointing to the gun, "is that, erm, did that have anything to do with the mess outside?"

She pursed her mouth, looking irritable rather than angry, "Error 404 were here. They didn't all leave alive, you know."

Simon became frustrated. "I'm not a terrorist, alright? I'm a civil service intern! I was…' he couldn't believe that he was the one having to defend

himself. '…the Deputy PM. Do you know him? George Wilson. I was involved in something he was planning to do… with the Coronation Service.' She wasn't buying it. 'he put me on a project…' it sounded so lame. 'You've got to believe me.' He pleaded, 'I was actually with your father that same day? At the British Library?'

"The same day?" her eyes blazed, "as what?"

"The same day as the bomb, a few hours before! He convinced me, he wanted me to know about the Bible, how it wasn't all made up."

"His favorite topic."

"Grayson said you could tell me more about the Logos. Some people think…" he checked himself, "…there are people who want to know what relationship the Logos have with Error 404. After meeting Grayson, I know they weren't the terrorists. They are protecting the past and all that but I get the impression that there is something that they are involved with that not many people know about, a big secret..."

Thea sighed, 'If there is then I don't know what it is. The members of the Logos were victims. The past that they were protecting, well they were the ones protecting the targets - the manuscripts…'

Simon tried to adjust his understanding, "So, your Dad?"

Thea walked down the remaining steps, gun lowered. She threw it onto the floor and collapsed into one of the chairs at the table on which the manuscripts lay. Putting her hands over her face, Simon thought she was crying but it turned out that she was just rubbing her face, evidently exhausted. "I think that the Logos were started up centuries ago to guard these documents. They believe it's some heavenly calling or something, passed down through the generations. When Error 404 happened, everything they had given their lives to keep safe was destroyed, everything.' she stopped herself. "Dad was one of them. Then I've got this ancestor, this knight, Edmund, who was one of them too back in the sixteenth century, anyway, it goes on and on."

Simon pulled out another of the chairs, waiting for her to indicate that it was okay for him to sit down. She looked up at him wearily as he looked at the missing part of the Sinai Codex, frowning.

"What is this?" he asked.

She shook her head, smiling. "Why are you here?" she asked. "You don't know anything about any of this, not really."

"Grayson sent me. To find you. I don't know why."

"I do," said Thea. "He told me about you. He said I could trust you, that you would help me if I got into difficulty."

"Looks like you can look after yourself," Simon said, indicating the door and the scene outside in the gloomy light.

She stood up and went over to the window, frowning. "Those men on your boat. Are they armed?"

'No!' he laughed, 'I hired them to get me to this island. Harmless. Kind of antsy about wanting to get back to Spain before dark."

She looked at him levelly. 'You're sure you're not part of Error 404?'

'Are you crazy? I work for the British government!' It sounded good like he was James Bond or something. 'I want to track down Error 404 and find out who's responsible for the bombs!'

Thea turned away, 'There's something I need to do but I don't need you to help me. Take me with you back to Spain and I'll go from there.'

'Go where?'

'Somewhere. You don't need to know.'

He put his hands up in submission and turned to leave, 'I'll be on the boat,' he said. He took a last glance at the large documents on the table. One of

them looked very similar to the old bible that he had seen at the British Library, the one that Summers was obsessed with.

How had Thea got hold of it? She must now be in the business of protecting manuscripts too, now? If so, she was surely a member of the Logos and Error 404 would continue to try and track her down. If he hung around her long enough, maybe they would come to him.

He could use her as bait.

Chapter 20 Day 16, Malaga

Thea watched the island of Alboran fade into the distance until the tip of the lighthouse merged with the washed-out clouds. She hoped with all her heart that Mariam, Alejandro, and Sadiq would not put themselves in danger to make the journey back to get her. She would contact them at The Francisco Franco at the first opportunity to tell them that she was safe. Even so, she'd left a note on the table in the lighthouse, promising that she would return Musa's diary to them as soon as possible.

She hugged herself in the lee of the wheelhouse on deck, trying to get warm, glad of an extra warm jumper, courtesy of the skipper who'd taken pity on her. She felt ecstatic that she was at last off the island after four uncomfortable nights on that mattress, glad that she was now in possession of an ancient copy of part at least of the book of Ezekiel, a lost portion of text from the Sinai Codex, her father's lifework. She didn't completely trust Derridge yet, keeping the wrapped-up package out of sight, stowing it in the seat cabinet below deck when no-one was looking, but she felt confident that he was not part of Error 404. Just some government guy trying to get to the bottom of the bombings, probably desperate for promotion. She didn't completely buy the civil-servant intern thing but he seemed like a genuine-enough bloke. He'd taken photos of the helicopter as well as samples of the wreck to take back to base when he was ready to return, something he seemed reluctant to do just yet.

She looked over the seething surface of the sea in their direction of travel, towards a horizon that seemed to clear at last of cloud, a blue strip of hope

now hovering over the next stage in her journey.

Meanwhile, Simon was being sick over the rail. She grinned to herself. She could probably trust him now. She was almost reluctant to part with his roguish manner, kind of intense but not unpleasant. Now that Error 404 was being pursued by UK intelligence, she thought that she might be able to make her way to Sinai in peace.

About two hours later, as twilight was setting in, the little boat chugged into a small port on the outskirts of Malaga. Derridge was still sleeping off his sea-sickness down below, and close as he was to the manuscript stowed in the cabinet below his head, Thea felt that he could do with a rest.

As they approached an empty berth on the pier, she saw two men in long coats, one of whom looked middle-eastern, wearing a beard. As they got closer and bumped into the hanging buoys, one of them jumped onto the boat, cutting off her escape.

'Thea Summers?' he growled.

'What do you want?' Thea asked, terrified that they were sent by Error 404.

'Derridge called us,' he said, breaking into a smile, 'we're here to say that we're very grateful for your service.'

'Okay,' she said weakly, holding onto the edge of the boat, 'and you are?'

'Sorry,' the bearded man gave a gesture of apology, 'I'm Simon's boss, Daran Garayan. This is my associate, Kieran Foster. Simon is assigned to my department in the civil service and I've been most impressed with everything that he's found out concerning the terrorist group Error 404 and their part in the museum bombings. I wanted to come and thank him personally.'

Thea was glad for Simon. 'He's just down below,' she told him, then grimaced conspiratorially, 'not a natural sailor.'

Garayan smiled, 'these clever types are all the same. No stomach for adventure. I'll get him back behind a desk where he belongs as soon as we've celebrated.'

There was a clatter of movement beneath them and Simon's creased face appeared through the hatch, white as a sheet. 'What are you doing here?' Thea thought he looked as though he had seen a ghost.

'Slapping you on the back, you intern genius,' Garayan said, 'Wilson wanted to be here himself, can you believe it? You've cracked this thing wide open. Your work with the Cambridge University Library and the terrorist Brian Truman has uncovered a massive cell who the squads are going after as we speak. It's been a good day! We've got to celebrate.'

'Okay,' said Derridge, but Thea recognized a change in him, a tension that gave him the air of a prisoner ready to run.

'You don't yet know about all the resources at our disposal, my friend,' Garayan said, laughing, 'soon it will all become clear. There's going to be a great job waiting for you when you get home. Straight from internship to a promotion, I'm sure of it.'

Thea watched the reunion, wondering why Derridge wasn't more excited, then remembered her priorities and decided to excuse herself from staying any longer.

'I'll say goodbye then. Thanks for the rescue boat.'

'Aren't you hungry?' Garayan put his hand on her arm, 'after four nights on the island, you must be ready for a great meal and a comfy bed. I know just the place and remember, it's on us. I've booked rooms at a nice little five-star hotel just around the corner. We'll send you on your way at our expense in the morning. Come on, if we can't celebrate now, when can we?'

Thea was amazed at the amount of information that Simon had passed onto his boss already. Still, he had a GPS phone. She needed to get her document safely to its destination in Sinai and didn't have time to stay any longer, particularly with officials who might signpost her presence. She couldn't

remember telling Derridge how many nights she'd spent on the island, either. It was a bit odd. She tried to examine Simon's face, wanting to get a moment when she could ask him what he had told them, but he gave nothing away.

Sitting around a table for four at the hotel restaurant in the warmth of the evening air, their table positioned on smooth paving around the edge of the dock, the masts of yachts bobbing against an inky black Mediterranean alongside them, Thea began to relax a bit. She joined in with the banter as Garayan ordered champagne.

'Tell me more about yourself, Thea,' he said, smiling, 'You ever thought about working for the civil service?'

Thea laughed, 'I haven't, no,' she said, noticing the waitress bringing the champagne and trying to remember the last time she'd had any, 'I just want to get to the end of my studies. See what I feel like doing then.'

'Classics and Greek was it, you said?'

She hadn't. Maybe it was something that Derridge had said. Although she hadn't told him that either.

'You've done your homework,' she said, nodding to the waitress who poured her drink and moved to fill other glasses. Garayan flinched, then acknowledged it.

'I guess we have. We need to be sure, you know, that you're not hiding something.'

'What else do you know about me?'

Garayan leaned forward on his elbows, his fingers intertwined and shoulders hunched. He paused respectfully. 'You've lost all of your family. Your mother and brother when you were a child and your father in the British Library bomb. You're in a sixth form in London, registered to do your 'A' Levels in a couple of months and I think I can guess from now on you're going to spend a bit less time on deserted islands.'

'I thought this was meant to be a cheerful occasion!' she tried to laugh off the intensity of Garayan's stare. 'What about you?' she said, trying to restore the light atmosphere, 'what was your childhood like?'

'Fairly mundane,' he said, 'brought up in Willesden in North London, good school, good university, fast-tracked on the civil service intern course, a bit like my protege here,' he indicated Simon with his glass, 'parents proud, grandparents far prouder. First in my family to be tertiary educated. That sort of thing.' He looked at his watch. 'Look, we'd better get on and order before it gets too late. Everyone decided?'

He put up his hand in request and the waitress came over to take their orders.

'Buenos noches,' she said, 'please, your room numbers?'

Thea's hand went instantly to the key in her pocket but Garayan put up an authoritative finger to stop her, 'it's on me, remember?' he said. He nodded to his silent companion, Kieran who pulled out not just a room key but another bunch of keys too.

He laid them on the table as he found the number and showed it to the waitress. Thea couldn't help seeing them the way he placed them down, deliberately showing off the Lamborghini key fob. She tried to hide a smile. She'd already got him down as a peacock. Just as she looked away, she saw something else on the keyring. Another fob with a logo that made her skin prickle. She'd seen that logo before. Concentric circles with a stylized S running through it

'Thea?' Simon was asking her something, 'what do you want to eat?'

'Ah, the special - the paella,' she said automatically, looking back at him and registering his nervous smile. Was he thinking the same thing about Foster? Come on, she urged herself, think. Where did I see that symbol before?

'Sorry,' she continued, trying to work it out, adding a bit of naivety to her tone as she tried to put her finger on it, 'I just couldn't help noticing your keys. Is that some sort of sports car?'

'Yeah, it certainly is' Kieran said, settling back into his seat with a smirk of pride, 'you ever been in a Lamborghini?'

'No such luck,' said Thea, presenting the sort of reaction that he seemed to want, 'where do you keep it?'

'It's back in London. Safe in a nice cozy underground garage.'

'Sounds sensible,' said Simon, a terse edge to his voice. Thea was worried the conversation would move on before she got a chance to ask her next question.

'Is that a sports car too?' she asked, pointing to the logo that had produced such a strange reaction in her.

'No, this is an even more classy,' he smirked, 'it's our helicopter. I could give you a spin in it first thing tomorrow if you like?'

She nodded with a smile that she hoped did not betray her. She knew where she had seen it before. On the side of Brian's helicopter. It was the same brand of machine as the one Alejandro had blown up with a flare gun. The government must buy their transportation from the same suppliers as Error 404.

Unless…

'What's the matter, Thea?' Simon asked.

'I'm sorry, I feel a bit ill. I think I need to go up to my room for a lie-down.' She had to get away from these men, retrieve the manuscript and leave straight away.

She wanted to talk to Simon to confirm her suspicions, too, but he was one step ahead of her. 'Do you need one of us to come with you?' he said, getting up, putting a protective arm around her.

'Yes, please, I'm sorry, I'm not usually like this. I think maybe the champagne on an empty stomach. With those rough seas too, I haven't eaten properly for days…'

'It's fine, please don't worry, go and get some rest in your room,' Garayan said, also getting up politely as they left the table.

'I'll be back shortly,' said Simon.

As soon as they had cornered the bar and were out of sight of the others, Thea stopped and turned to him. 'We've got to get out of here,' she hissed, 'I think they've got something to do with Error 404!"

'I agree,' Simon said, 'the office didn't know what I was doing. Not after Grayson made me disappear. They must have picked me up when I turned on the GPS phone.'

Thea marched ahead to the foyer and hit the lift call button, waiting impatiently as an elderly couple passed them in the corridor. After what seemed like an age, the lift opened but a group had to saunter out before they could get in on their own and continue their conversation.

'That helicopter key,' Thea said, 'it's got the same livery as the one on Alboran, the one sent by Error 404.'

"I don't understand how Garayan could be part of it," Simon said quietly, 'but he is, so we need to leave.

'He knew the exact number of nights I'd spent on the island!' Thea breathed, as though there might be microphones even here in the lift.

'Let's get our things, then get out of here,' she said as the lift doors opened on her floor.

'Meet you in the foyer. Be quick," he said.

Letting herself into the room Thea flipped on the lights and opened the cupboard where she'd hidden the documents before dinner.

The space where she had left it was empty.

'Looking for this?'

Daran Garayan stood in the doorway, holding the missing part of the Sinai Codex, a strange smile on his face.

'Yes,' said Thea, relieved and scared at the same time, 'thank you, but…'

Simon appeared behind him and instantly hit him over the head with a fire extinguisher. Garayan dropped the book and fell against the wall, sliding to the ground. Thea stared at him, then back at Simon.

'Quick,' urged Simon, picking up the Codex and reaching across Garayan's body to grab her wrist, pulling her back towards the corridor, 'Kieran's right behind me, we've got to get out of here.'

'There's a fire escape up the other end of the corridor,' she said, 'this way.'

A shot rang out behind them as they stumbled along the orange and brown patterned hotel carpet, dodging out of range by turning right into a short side corridor which led to a glass door with a crash bar opening to an outdoor metal fire escape.

The night was warm and their footsteps rang out far too loudly as they clattered down the four flights, Thea awkwardly supported the huge Codex, shoving it into her armpit.

'He'll be onto us any minute. We've got to get out of sight,' panted Simon, looking around for inspiration. They were only half-way down the stairs when the metal fire door above them was flung open and heavy steps hammered onto the clanking staircase.

Thea looked out, back up and saw Foster on his way down to them. As they passed another fire door, accessed by a lower floor, Derridge gave the door a rattle, wishing there were guests the other side who could let them back in but no-one was around and they continued down, vulnerable to Foster's aim.

'Zig-zag!' He said, barely audible above his short breaths.

'What?' was he going mad?

'When we get to the bottom of the stairs, head for those bushes, over that wall, but run in a zig-zag, not straight.'

'Right.' She wasn't sure she could move like that with the Codex but she had no choice. Derridge was already ahead of her, reaching the bottom and looking up at the progress of their pursuer.

He turned and looked at her. 'When you get over the wall, lie down flat against it on the other side. I'll draw his fire,' and he was off.

She heard the shots and focused on running as fast as she possibly could, putting in a few sidesteps as she did so, thrashing through the bushes and hurling herself over the chest-high wall. She crouched there, glad that they were still hidden by low trees, half-visible from a street light on the road nearby.

A few seconds later, there was a crash beside her and Derridge landed heavily, breathing hard.

'Back against the wall, quick,' he said. She did as he said and it wasn't long before a thump and a groan sounded just a few meters along the wall from where they were. In the half-light, she saw Simon lunge at the figure, grappling with him as he caught him with his gun gripped awkwardly, clamped against the wall as Foster tried to pull himself over the top of it. Thea watched as the gun flew away from them both and skittered to a stop just the other side of the trees.

'Get it!' shouted Derridge, as Foster's weight heaved itself over the wall and onto the top of him, collapsing together onto the ground. Thea left the Codex against the wall and ran to the gun, picking it up with the feel of it in her hand so different from the semi-automatic she'd used on the island.

She pointed it at Kieran, her hands shaking.

'Who are you working for?' she demanded.

He stood up, smiling, 'you don't know how to use it, sweetheart. Come on, give it back to me.'

Her shot picked up the earth close to his foot and he turned white.

'You're not the first. I'll aim at your head next time,' she said, smiling as he put his hands into the air.

'Nice shooting,' grinned Simon, standing up next to her.

'Who are you working for?' she repeated, a little more aggressively, liking the effect she was having on them both.

'It's a lie, you morons, all of it, all that crap about the Bible." Foster said, unwilling to be drawn, "the sooner the world is rid of it completely, the better.'

'Is Daran in on this too?' gasped Simon.

'You're a low-rank intern. Getting this far was a fluke. Accept that and go back to the office. If you're lucky they may put you back at the start of the program. Forget any of this happened, if they let you.'

'Does the deputy PM know about your interesting allegiances?' Simon asked slowly.

'You're in way over your head. I'm the happy, pleasant end of the snake, I promise you.'

'Doesn't matter which end it is,' Thea said wryly, 'it's still a snake.'

'Let's get out of here,' said Simon, taking the gun from her and shooting Kieran in the thigh with a single tap.

Thea picked up the manuscript and without a second thought, followed him out of the bushes, weaving around cars and down a dark alley as Kieran's screams faded into the distance and new sirens brewed from the direction of the town center.

'Where are we going?' she panted at his shoulder, trying to keep up.

'The port.' He said, 'got to find a boat about to leave.'

'Which direction?' she asked, her lungs beginning to burn from the exertion of running while carrying the heavy bundle.

'The way you want to go. East.'

Chapter 21 Day 30, Ben Ezra Synagogue

The cool interior of the souk was a blessed relief after the mad crush of Cairo traffic. The taxi had taken so long to crawl through the tightly packed streets that Thea had scrunched her coat into a pillow and fallen asleep against the window.

They had arrived in the city in the very early morning, relieved to stand on solid ground. Their journey from Spain by fishing boat, across the Mediterranean and now finally up the mouth of the Nile delta had taken fourteen days, with many stops along the way. Sardinia, Malta, Cyprus, Alexandria, each time docking with a dread that they might be picked off the boat, haunted by the constant expectation that someone would be waiting for them. But their false passports raised no suspicions with the port authorities or with the quiet Italian captain who had let them travel on board. In the end, their biggest problem had been paying for their passage. Thea used the remainder of the Euros from the *Just In Case* bag and Simon had supplemented the sum with his expensive watch to buy the Captain's silence.

"That was my graduation present," he said, looking away as he handed it over to the very pleased captain.

"We can get you another one in the market, " Thea said, "although I'm not sure it will be an original."

"It's a massive over-payment," he grumbled, "but at least he won't tell anyone about us."

They had checked into a hotel on the edge of the oldest part of the city. Now, Thea was back on hyper-alert mode as Simon forged ahead through the Egyptian crowd and she had to jog to keep up. She had taken an instant

dislike to the local men who had called out to her and even grabbed her by the shoulder a few times. She had no choice but to make it look as though she was taken, holding Simon's hand, reassuring herself that this had the added benefit that she wouldn't lose him.

With her other hand, she clutched at the rucksack on her front, carrying the Codex, the diaries, the false passports, and other bits and pieces. They were passing through the pottery area of the market, evident from the repetitive sets of colorful porcelain set out on rickety tables. The salesmen pushed teapots and porcelain cups into their faces, decorated with kitschy pyramids, pharaohs, and cartouches. The afternoon sun seemed to make solid rods out of columns of dust as it slanted through tiny holes in the domed roof. They negotiated their way through the maze of stalls at the edge of the souk, coming out at the place she'd been curious to get to ever since she had first read Edmund's writings.

The Ben Ezra synagogue.

The street they'd come to was lined with scrubby low bushes and cracked paving. The debris on the streets of Cairo was bad everywhere but here it seemed even worse. The synagogue had a well-kept concrete facade, topped with a turreted roof, facing onto the street but separated from the mess of the street by an austere metal fence. A formal entrance identified the synagogue as a popular tourist destination with a scanner doorway and security guards. Thea had already pocketed some of the Egyptian notes, ready to pay for their entry.

"Remind me why we're here?" Simon said.

Thea hesitated. She had already told him about the Genizah that Edmund had found and he had seemed interested at the time.

He squinted up at the facade, "I thought we needed to get to the monastery? Why stop here? We'll just waste money."

His irritability made her waver. She needed him to help her get to Sinai and didn't want to annoy him. "We'll get a bus heading south after this," she said, wanting to reassure him, "but I'm curious about this place, there's

something I need to find out." She pulled at his arm as they approached the entrance. "Please could you direct me to a supervisor?" she asked the guard, whose disinterest prompted her to ask again.

"There is reception inside," he said, waving a hand towards the entrance, "you ask there."

They passed through security to the bag search. She offered the rucksack up for inspection before realizing what she was showing them.

"What is this?" the guard asked, investigating the manuscript, frowning and pulling at a walkie-talkie on his chest, speaking Arabic into it, causing a ripple around them as the officials bristled.

"I need to see a supervisor," Thea repeated firmly, improvising, "I have important information for the synagogue." She glanced at Simon who gave her a worried, questioning look. "I have something which he must see."

There were more shouts, some crackle of communications over the walkie talkies and after a long twenty minutes waiting on the plastic-coated sofa in the entrance hall, an official approached them. "The chief Rabbi will see you. Come with us."

Were they being forced to go or was her request to see a supervisor being granted? They were ushered into a neat office, filled with ceremonial and historical artifacts, the walls covered with framed photos, documents, and shelves filled with beautiful objects. An austere, elderly man with a long beard and small glasses sat behind the desk, standing and gesturing to chairs on the other side of it.

"Thank you for seeing us," started Thea.

"It is you I wanted to question," said the old man. I have been the Chief Rabbi here at Ben Ezra for almost fifteen years and I have seen many come to Egypt searching for valuable documents, some to steal them under the pretext of archaeological discovery. I think that the official word that the Germans and the British use for this is 'retrieve'. This document that you

have with you is considered by my security to be one of these. I will decide. Show me the manuscript you have in your bag."

Thea paused and frowned. "My purpose is to protect, not to destroy. I did not 'retrieve' these documents from this country. We are on our way to return this codex to where it belongs." She drew Ezekiel carefully from her bag, its sweet smell of perfumed wax wafting through the office as she did so. The room was filled with quiet as he looked through the pages with a quiet reverence.

"Of course I recognize this," said the Rabbi with a deep sigh. "This is part of the Codex Sinaiticus, that characteristic Greek Uncial script is so familiar, from a Scriptorium of Alexandria, probably the Serapeum. So, you are traveling to the Sinai convent, not away from it, not like its sister, the Codex Sinaiticus. Not like that renowned thief, the esteemed Constantin von Tischendorf." He paused, looking for some response but to Thea, it meant nothing. He sighed, "where did you find it then?"

"Please forgive me if I do not give you all of the details at this time," said Thea with respect, still unsure how much to trust this man who had already worked out so much of their plans for himself. "I need to know about your genizah, the place where the documents are stored. After the destruction of so many places holding documents around the world, I hoped that at least this place was safe?"

The chief rabbi looked at her curiously, a smile playing around his face, "the genizah?" he said, "so I can tell from your reactions that you do not know of Tischendorf. So how do you know about our genizah?"

"I read about it in a diary written a long time ago, in the sixteenth century. An ancestor of mine, a knight, took advantage of the hospitality here at Ben Ezra and saw it."

The Rabbi stood up with a full smile on his face. "So, we are still hidden from the rest of the world in this," he said, "even you who seem to know much of ancient manuscripts are unaware of our history." He looked up at the framed pictures on the wall and reached up to unhook one, a black and white photo of a man hunched over a desk in a long room filled with trestle

tables, chests, and sacks, overflowing with messy papers. He handed it to them. "Do you know who this is?" he asked. Thea and Simon shook their heads. "He is Doctor Schechter, a Victorian professor of Semitic studies at Cambridge, an expert in Hebrew, Aramaic and Syriac languages. Greek too. This is a room in the library at Cambridge University."

Simon lent forward, studying the photo more closely. "Cambridge University library?" he asked, "but I was there, I saw…"

"In 1898, this man 'discovered' our genizah. At that time there were those here at the synagogue who had found a way to supplement their incomes. During the last few decades of the nineteenth century, following Tischendorf's great betrayal, there was a rush of bible-hunters coming to Egypt something in the manner of the gold rush of California. Some of our people took papers from the genizah and sold them in the souks of Cairo. They were quickly bought for large amounts of money. Some of these papers were identified by the famous twin lady-adventurers, Gibson and Lewis, who showed them to Schechter. You have heard of the Sinai Palimpsest?" Thea looked confused so he continued, "Schechter came here and was permitted to take everything from the genizah."

"So there is nothing left?" asked Thea, incredulous.

"Nothing, my dear. Your sixteenth-century knight wrote his account of something that is now no more. Not for over a hundred and twenty years."

"Where are all of those documents now?" asked Simon.

Thea sensed that she already knew the answer. They would be scattered around the museums, libraries and private collections of the world. Many of which were now obliterated.

The chief rabbi heaved a long sigh and put the photo back on the wall. "Most are, or were, in the University Library in Cambridge. One hundred and ninety thousand of the total three hundred-odd thousand, I believe. Perhaps if they had stayed here, we too would be clearing up the mess and accounting for our losses that Error 404 has brought on the places that sought to protect our Word of God. So there is one way in which I am a

little thankful. Those documents were not so safe in those civilized places after all, eh?"

The Rabbi went to one of his many shelves and pulled out a slim volume. He held it out to Thea, "read this," he said, "it will fill in some of the gaps. Useful to know, particularly if you're going to Saint Catherine's."

She looked at the cover. *The Letters of Agnes Lewis and Margaret Gibson 1897-1899* . "Thanks," she said, uninspired, but putting it into her bag and smiling brightly, not wanting to look ungrateful.

The Chief Rabbi stroked the rough wooden cover of the Codex, his fingers running over the traces of wax still ingrained in it. "This is a Christian treasure, written as it is in Greek. It does not belong here, where we hold Hebrew to be God's chosen language of his communication with mankind. The monks of Sinai will look after it, they are Greek themselves, after all. However, Error 404 must not know where it is or they will go to break open that place too."

"The ones who know about it are dead." Thea said, remembering Alboran, the twisted ruins of the helicopter and the deaths of the gunmen, then Brian's body flopping backward with the red stain leaking from his chest, "and we have not been followed." She thought of Foster and Daran Garayan and how they had evaded them, then considered the Captain of the fishing boat and the delight with which he had taken possession of Simon's watch. Would he cave in when Error 404 questioned him? Probably.

"Good," he said, "you may go."

Thea was relieved that they weren't going to be held here as manuscript thieves but still felt the fear of the next step. They needed his help. "Can you help us get to Sinai?" she asked, looking at Simon, who nodded.

The Rabbi paused, looking out of the window as a clock ticked in the silence, "Come back after closing hours," he said eventually, "to this address." He wrote down some words on a scrap of paper which he handed to her. "It is not far. I will hope to have some transport organized for you."

Although all seemed safe, the Rabbi showed them out a different way, avoiding the main entrance, exiting through a messy storeroom door that backed onto bins and a couple of disheveled-looking cars.

"See you later," he said, "I'll get you safely on your way to Sinai, don't you worry."

As they left, the shadows in the street were lengthening, swallows were diving in and out of the eaves of the buildings above her and a man with a donkey pulling a cart walked down the middle of the pot-holed street. The man must have been in his thirties, Thea thought, although he looked much older. His eyes were hollow and his face looked stretched, pinched, with matted hair covering his ears and neck. He wore a tattered jacket.

"My jacket!" Simon cried, "I left it in the Rabbi's office!"

"Why did you take it off?" Thea returned.

"I was hot?" he said. Thea walked back with him and stayed outside while he disappeared back through the storeroom door, which turned out to be unlocked. Then she returned to the road to watch the world go by. She began wondering what sort of home the man with the donkey lived in as she watched him disappear around the corner at the end of the street. He must be a kind man because his donkey looked well cared for.

At that moment there was an explosion and the synagogue spat fire and smoke as the blast knocked her back off the wall she was sitting on. Her ears rang and squealed as her head throbbed, hardly able to connect with what was happening. Somewhere in the distance, the donkey brayed in terror and sirens started up.

Simon.

She moved back towards the synagogue but black smoke rose into the air and the sound of glass and masonry falling, together with screams and fire from some of the windows prevented her from moving any closer. There were shouts in the street and a chill went through her confused and terrified mind.

Why then? Why now? She felt more vulnerable and scared than ever before. Was it a coincidence? She had to know if Simon was okay. But she had to get away, too.

"Thea!"

Turning, she saw a figure emerge from the ruins like a ghost, merging into the wreckage behind it, covered with dirt and ash. She couldn't believe what she was seeing; was it him?

She stood frozen for a moment, overcome by a new thought. Was Simon one of them? Had he caused this explosion? What did she know about him?

As she gingerly picked back over the rubble towards him, sirens screamed, the emergency services arrived.

"What happened?" she said as he fell onto her, fresh blood seeping from cuts on his face and arms.

"Don't know…" he stumbled as they moved away, "but they're here. Error 404. We've got to get away."

Thea's moment of doubt about him passed. He would not have compromised himself by being in the building when the bomb went off, she was convinced of that now.

The evening light bloomed against the walls of the city, ochre and rich in the hues of the setting golden sun. They hobbled through an alleyway, glancing behind them, unaware of anything but the need to put distance between themselves and their pursuers. A few minutes later, they burst out onto the main street, the horns and noise of hundreds of vehicles drowning Thea's thoughts as they wove in and out of the packed traffic.

Were they being followed? Thea breathed hard, panicked and terrified, not knowing which way to go. Simon wasn't much help but he didn't seem to be injured beyond the cuts and bruises. Looking behind her, she saw no-one running after them but how did she know that any one of these hundreds of

pedestrians thronging the pavements in front of the shops weren't watching them, waiting for their next move.

"They knew we were there?" she said, "was that why they attacked?"

Simon nodded feebly in reply. She had to get him back to the hotel, work out how injured he was. She pulled a scarf off a stand as she went past and draped it around her head, trying to blend in with the other women of the city.

The crackle of a walkie talkie nearby stopped her in her tracks. Two policemen on horseback hurried past, heading in the direction she had just come. That sound made her wonder. When they had looked in her bag and reported what they had seen over the radio, others may have been listening. Others would have heard. They had got there quickly, to destroy this document that she had in her bag.

Why were they so threatened by it? Why did they need to destroy, burn, eradicate these ancient things?

She looked at Simon, leaning on her as she panted hard, her lungs struggling, filling her throat with burning rasps of smoggy air. She couldn't support his weight much longer. She raised her hand briefly in the direction of a taxi and three swerved in front of her, their drivers leaping out and shouting at them to get inside. She chose the closest one and instantly regretted it, the back seat covered with a torn and dirty plastic covering. Without the strength to get back out, she hauled Simon in and the driver slammed the door and leaped back into the front seat.

"Where to?" he asked.

"Marimba hotel, Napoleon Street," she said, hiding her face from the police car that drew alongside them.

"You criminals?" the driver laughed, turning the car around through several lanes of oncoming traffic, "you those runaways they looking for? Those Error 404 Ben Ezra bombers?"

Thea gritted her teeth. "You know already?"

"You are not usual tourists and the radio has been trying to find you. But you have chosen the right taxi. You have money, yes? Rich terrorists?"

"We're not Error 404," muttered Simon, "that's not us."

Thea arranged her scarf around her head so that she could not be recognized and pushed Simon down onto the seat, his head resting on her rucksack. She thought of the bunches of Egyptian currency stuffed into one of its pockets and hoped that it would be enough. "Yes, we have money. We can pay you well. Will you help us to get out of Cairo? Maybe you have another vehicle?"

The taxi driver smiled at her in the rearview mirror. "Not just vehicle. Myself and my family, we will get you out of the city for the right price."

She pulled out the full amount of money that she had left, unaware of its value, "Will that do?"

The driver's eyes widened. "That is very nice indeed, thank you," he said.

Chapter 22 1897 The Smith Sisters

January 18th, 1897, Cairo.

Dear Mr. Harris,

Following my correspondence on our safe arrival a few days ago, I have more wonderful news to pass on to you which I cannot withhold any longer, although I must press upon you the importance of keeping the details of our find to yourself. After all, we have been through to our cost regarding the need for the appropriate and apt release of information, I know that you will appreciate the problems that might ensue if we give the papers a lead on this.

After meeting with our dear Mr. Schechter at the Hotel d'Angleterre on Tuesday, he took us immediately to the Ben Ezra synagogue in the old part

of the city. Agnes is still stiff from the journey, claiming that, since her prolonged illness last year, she is unable to move with her old agility. However, this apparent difficulty proved inconsequential when we arrived at the trove of manuscripts in the genizah of Ben Ezra. Inside the building is a plain wall above the gallery, with a window set high up in it. A precarious ladder was set up and the wide spaces between the rungs initially made us unwilling to make the climb. This changed when one of the synagogue servants climbed up and we heard the inviting sound as he waded through piles of vellum on the other side. Agnes, as you can imagine, wasted no time in following him, her aches and pains forgotten.

Once in the darkness of the genizah, we found ourselves in an utter mess of papers, dust, and sand, much of which had been water damaged at various points in its history. Our dear Solomon was amid his toil, having packed into sacks at least forty thousand separate documents presenting themselves in the form of, as he calls it, 'rugged, jumbled, dirty stuff'. He has agreed with the Chief Rabbi to clear this place, promising him that it will be protected in the libraries of Cambridge and other academic institutions eager to research the boundless gift of knowledge regarding the history of the Semitic people. The documents that he has examined so far reach back over the past thousand years and include a range of religious writings, Old Testament, Talmud, rabbinic Midrash and a range of Jewish literary writings of great importance.

Schechter has allowed us to keep any manuscript evidence of the canonical books of the Old Testament since these are the only manuscripts of interest to us. We have also retrieved a great number of fragments from our network of contacts in the souks who have come into possession of documents from the genizah through the unscrupulous behavior of synagogue workers. It does not matter to us that we have had to part with more money to buy these back but we have had no other place but our hotel bedroom in which to wash the filth of the centuries from them. Our room is now covered with drying pieces of vellum!

However, we are most satisfied with our discoveries. We will leave Mr. Schechter to continue with his dusty work and proceed to Sinai for our fourth visit to the monks as soon as we get passage.

Pass on our warmest greetings to your dear wife.

With richest blessings,

Margaret Gibson

8th February 1897, Saint Catherine's Convent, Sinai.

Mr. Harris,

I am writing with great thanks to our Lord for our safe passage to our beloved Sinai, our fourth visit in five years, in response to your correspondence which reached us at Suez where we boarded a vessel of the Khedival Steamship Company. As the only women in first-class accommodation, we received courteous and attentive service from the ship's captain and officers during our voyage down the Red Sea and round to Tor on the East coast of the Sinai peninsula.

We were pleased to see the effects of much rain on the usually bleak and dry landscape, making supplies of meat and milk much more plentiful than usual. I found riding a camel much more wearing on my knees than before and so preferred to walk which greatly eased my rheumatism and being three rather than seven days of travel, we were soon with our old friends in that place that has become so well known to us. The peak of Sinai is covered in snow and the convent gardens filled with almond blossom.

Father Polycarp showed his usual enthusiasm at our arrival and would not let us pitch our tents in the usual place before he had shown us our treasured palimpsest safely in the box that I had sent and still wrapped in the stripy silken cover donated by Mrs. Bensly during those forty difficult days of transcription only a few years ago. When I look upon it now, sitting so innocently and so safe in these fortified walls, I find it incredible to think that it remains a globally recognized and strong witness to the early dating of the gospel writings, refuting those scholars who have proposed a dating for any of the gospels later than the second century. More than that, I find Providence so kind in directing us away from our original intentions to visit this place six years previously. I would not have learned the Syriac language, nor would I have met you and heard about the cupboard which

you did not have time to investigate, nor would I have in my possession letters of recommendation from Cambridge university and other notable authorities. It has also been much to our benefit that we can speak modern Greek, the language of the monks. There is a genuine affection and trust that communicates itself to us because of this.

The benefits of our endeavors to catalog the library on that same trip continue to be felt. The monks are always sure to praise our efforts to foreign visitors within our hearing. This catalog has prevented visiting scholars from supposing that they might be able to 'retrieve' a manuscript that should stay within these walls, knowing as they do now that it has been recognized, logged and recorded as belonging to the library and cannot be removed.

This is one reason why I believe that the crowning achievement of our discovery in 1892 and during the intervening years is the enduring presence of the palimpsest in the place where it was initially discovered, available now to be studied by any visitor whom the monks deem trustworthy.

I know that you, my dear Rendel, will be pleased to know of our ongoing pleasure in spending time here. We expect to be back in May for a day which we have been looking forward to greatly, the laying of the foundation stone of the Cambridge college that Margaret and I are founding, Westminster College.

May you keep well until then.

Your faithful friend,

Agnes

25th May 1897, Cambridge University.

Dear Sirs,

I write concerning your article of 22nd May, in which your correspondent considered it appropriate to use a humorous tone to report the results of the vote held by the authorities of Cambridge University in which it was

decided by a majority that the colleges should continue to deny the conferment of degrees on women.

It imbues the events of today, also in Cambridge, with great irony. A foundation stone was laid by the two benefactors of the new Westminster College for men of the Presbyterian faith. These two benefactors are scholars of the highest renown, with the study of countless languages and discoveries to their names that have stunned academics across the world. Yet they are not honored with degrees from Cambridge, even though their credentials are flawless.

This is solely because they are women.

Mrs. Agnes Lewis and Mrs. Margaret Gibson are, above all others, reason enough for us to be ashamed, rather than amused by the result of the May 21st vote. I expect your apology, Sirs, in tomorrow's publication of the Times.

Yours,

Dr. J. Rendel Harris,

Cambridge

Chapter 23 1540 Edmund

Edmund Somers sensed that his fast in the cave of Moses on the summit of the Mountain of God was almost over. Complete purification was at hand.

His thoughts were few and his actions even fewer. He breathed in, no longer needing focus to sense the presence of God, no longer feeling the pain in each nerve as his ribcage lifted and dry air flowed through his nose, his throat and into his lungs.

Earlier in this period of devotion, he had needed to shift on the uneven stone floor. He might have flinched as the thin drafts sidled around him. He might even have raised a finger to wipe away a speck of sand that had

lodged itself behind his lower eyelid. Now, he was unaware of any physical discomfort.

Now, he could be still.

Memorized scripture gushed through his mind like a waterfall. Each word, each syllable was alive.

In his hand is the life of every creature and the breath of all mankind…I have life within me, the breath of God in my nostrils.

He felt God's breath as it flowed through him, filling him, nourishing him. It was enough now. So unlike the beginning of this task.

For the first week or so, the thought of food had entangled him. He'd been tempted to leave this place but fought against it, determined not to give in. He had filled his mouth with pebbles, passionately weeping over the lack of food, longing to swallow even the tiniest of morsels once more.

As he had argued with himself and forced himself to stay here in the cave, gripping onto rocks to hold himself in, gaining some relief as he sucked the little remaining water from the stone trough, filled for the duration of the fast.

Then he had lain on the floor of the cave in a haze of delirium, his stomach pressed with rocks to staunch the pain. When he had ceased to cry out and as his voice faded, the whispers of the cave wove around him, speaking peace, stillness, rest.

That peace led to clarity and at last, he experienced a state of mind in which he did not need anything physical. He felt subdued. Silenced.

So as he sat here looking at the wall, he knew a new thought. That he did not want to leave.

A speck of dust moved and settled and rose again. All of his life and consciousness and the wealth of the universe was here.

"It's time."

A voice pounded the cave, pulling the mountainside down on top of him. He wanted to cover his ears but his hands would not lift from his knees.

"Edmund?" there were knocks, bumps, striking his eyes with the pain of a thousand suns as it shone its spears off his precious still walls.

"No. Not yet." His utterings were whispers in a storm.

"You've done it, Edmund! Forty days of fasting! Your task is complete."

He knew it was not.

"I must … finish."

The grip on his arms and the lifting of his head were huge movements that he couldn't make sense of. He flew through the air seeing the wonderful floor of the cave disappearing away from him, wanting it back, trying to grab onto it but knowing that his fingers would not curl, his feet would not grip.

"We must hurry," said the voice.

Edmund couldn't answer. His lips and teeth barely separated, such was the effort and strength needed. His flight continued out of the mouth of the cave, into the night that shouted and flashed with its brash noise and overwhelming light of the night sky. Although Edmund clenched his eyes shut, it still felt as though his eyelids had been removed, such was the intensity of the stars.

It fired his memories. The horror of blasting cannon as he watched the advancing galleys of Barbarossa at Preveza just two years before. The shock of capture by the Ottomans. Then Musa, the Moor captor who became his friend. He recalled his excitement as they discussed plans for a southern pilgrimage. His heart had thrilled at the prospect of the sight of Sinai, then there it was and it dominated his life and desires. He had spent heady days of peaceful toil in the monastery library, poring over the ancient words, the scrolls, and books of scripture, a treasure trove of deep learning and knowledge.

He had passed vigils in the church, listening to the prayers of the monks, whispering through the basilica of the Chapel of the Burning Bush. The joy of translation as he worked in the library amongst the ancient Bible texts, made by the Romans at the behest of one emperor and brought here by another, looking for redemption.

Edmund had fled an England overrun by English translations of the scriptures. A new sect claimed that the Pope, the holy church, the rituals and rites that his life was built on were obsolete heresy. He doubted the motives and veracity of the over-reaching German monk who had propagated them.

Brought up in Carbrooke, Norfolk, by the Knights Hospitallers, he had been shocked at the actions of a King who wished to separate himself from the Pope because of his frustration with a Queen who would not bear him a son.

Urged by his order to pursue a sanctifying pilgrimage overseas, he had responded to a call from the Pope to join in a Holy war against the Ottomans. That is how he had found himself at Preveza, longing to fight for the Pope in the tradition of the now spent crusades.

Yet he had ended up here, finding the truth of the monk's translation burning the truth of the Lord into his soul as he had studied original writings for himself. He sought further clarity, further illumination. The tangle of heavy weights that hung around his heart was melted by a new light of grace that lifted him and called him whole. In rapture at the new life that this brought, he sought nothing but the Lord. He longed to be at peace and retreated to the Sinai cave that Moses, Elijah, and Muhammed had inhabited at their various times. The monks came here to complete a forty-day fast. He had longed to do the same.

The stink of the camel as it waited drifted up to him and Edmund felt ill as he was draped over its back and secured with soft lengths of cloth that tied him close. The thick matted coat, filled with sand, feces, and parasites, rocked against his face and still, he could say nothing and the voices around him roared.

He only knew that it was too early. He had been careful to mark the time and he had not yet reached forty days. Frustration struggled against the

movement of this hideous rocking barge. He moaned.

"We have no time, Edmund. We must leave, right now."

The gradient finally eased but the tops of the surrounding mountains did not fit with the pattern of those around Saint Catherine's. Where were they going? Even the stars blazed in anger.

"It is not safe to return. Bedouin raiders. They attacked with over one hundred men on horseback. Many of the monks are dead, along with the warriors stationed to protect them. The Emperor will show them his might but in the meantime, we must escape through the desert, head North."

Edmund felt the benefits of his sacrifice ebb away with every bone-jarring step of the camel. He thought of the books that he had been studying in Saint Catherine's library, the ancient texts. He had translated so many pages of the prophets, kings and gospel writers and he had drunk their new-found, glorious riches. Would he ever see them again? He had wanted to take his writings back home, to show others what he had previously failed to understand.

That night passed and they put up tents to rest in through the heat of the day, followed by more travel at night, following the ancient trail from well to well, sometimes several days' journey apart. Musa picked up information from traders and pilgrims as they passed.

"News has come of changes in your country, my friend. The King is destroying your houses of religion. Monasteries, holy items on fire, your brothers burned at the stake."

Edmund stared into the red coals of the campfires, night after night, listening to the exchanges in strange languages of the rough traders.

"Ask them how they received this news. Are they sure?" He would ask and always it was the same answer.

"Yes, this is the truth."

Then the night came when a man was brought to him, eyes hollow and movements full of pain, come from being cared for by Somers' order, the Knights Hospitallers, in Jerusalem, after being tortured to conform to the new faith of the King.

"They have taken in many looking for permanent refuge from the reaches of the adulterous King of England." He said. "You would do well to do the same. Don't go home."

Edmund had dreaded the return to England when he would have to admit that his ideas had changed. Could he now be tempted to stay?

"Were there any there from Carbrooke? Norfolk. I wonder, is there any news of my Order there?"

The man looked at him strangely, then looked down at the ground in front of him. "I did indeed meet a Knight from Carbrooke there." He picked up a small stone from the ground and played it between his fingers before throwing it in the fire. "The Kings' soldiers have destroyed everything."

Musa, sitting next to him, hooked an arm around his shoulders.

"I'm sorry, Edmund." He said, "Perhaps you can come home with me! I am heading back to my homeland in the West."

He discovered that Musa had not only rescued him but he had brought the manuscript he had been studying as well. Two books, bound with wooden covers and heavy metal clasps, pressing the parchment together. They swung in saddlebags against the flanks of two other camels, who chewed, spat and defecated, unaware of the precious cargo on their backs.

"That belongs at the monastery! We must return it!" Edmund cried, imagining the faces of the monks when they found them missing.

Musa smiled and shook his head. "That place will have been looted and burned. We have saved them, think of it that way. One day, you will return to your land and show your people what treasures you have discovered in this land of ours, in the glorious Ottoman empire!"

Dazed and battered by a further two-week journey through the desert, Edmund found himself leaning over the bow of a galley on its way to Algiers, emptying his guts into the churning Mediterranean Sea. He had never had good sea-legs but this was different. Shivering back in his hammock, he realized that he had contracted a disease from those barren parts that was creeping throughout his already weakened frame. He turned, his eyes fading, seeing the solid chest that Musa had procured for him wedged tightly between other chests and barrels. The precious words of the manuscript, safe for now, reverberated through his fractured consciousness.

He held pages of an account from Musa about their travels close to his heart, keeping them safe under his shirt. As they sailed on and his future seemed bleaker, he decided that he too needed to write something of his experiences.

When the minarets and domes of the mosques in Algiers came into view, a panic grew amongst the crew. The captain grasped Edmund's shoulders as he sat helpless against the mast, excused from rowing by Musa's generosity.

"We are in trouble, Sir Somers," he said, regret shimmering in his eyes, "our telescopes have identified the warships of the corsair, Ali Hamet. I have been ordered by the Emperor to submit to his direction if he chooses to requisition this ship. I cannot tell you any more than that, only that you will be taken prisoner if he sees you. The protection that I have been able to offer you cannot extend any further than this."

Edmund's heart filled with panic. In his feeble condition, he could hardly move off the ship, let alone protect the books. He could not allow them to be lost. He hauled himself up, clutching at the bouncing rails along the bucking sides, slipping and falling down the ladder into the bowels of the ship. Forgetting about his safety, he searched his mind for ways to protect his important cargo from the Barbary pirates who would certainly destroy it. The barrels and chests around his own were nailed shut and stamped with scrawls of Turkish. In their studies at the monastery, he and Musa had exchanged ideas, debated, discussed, resisted one another's arguments and proclaimed the veracity of faith as far as they dared, before agreeing that they could not agree and instead taking the stairs to the flat roof of the monastery and reveling in the cool breeze as it blew up from the midnight

desert, lit by the beauty of the heavens above them. Among the ideas they had debated was the condition of the human heart. They both agreed that it was sinful before birth. They both agreed that a true God could not tolerate the sin of man. But how to be rid of this sin? Hearts turn to wax in the hands of the Lord, they agreed on that. Bal mumu, Musa had said. We are only bal mumu.

He knew that he would not survive this.

The huge jars in front of him bore these words; bal mumu. Wax. Perfumed, most probably, expensive wax to burn in the mosques of the city that lay before them. He held his breath. If the manuscripts were covered, buried beneath this wax, they might survive even if they were sunk in the waters below.

The rhythmic shouts of the galley oarsmen above him gave strength to his purpose as he cracked open the seal of the nearest jar, inhaling its overpowering scent as it dulled the stink of this place below decks. He knelt at the chest and hauled out the bound texts, scattering them with repentant breaths amongst the dirt and detritus of the charging boards of the boat. He then scooped handfuls of the stuff into the long wooden cavity, packing it onto the base. Fire. He needed fire. An oil lamp swung from the rafters and he grabbed it by the chain, swinging it into the chest. The heated oil flowed out and lit an orange carpet of flame as it welcomed the additional fuel, melting it into the protective shell that Edmund required. Quickly he added wax pellets, dripping them down the sides, catching his fingers in the flames and beating them back as they tried to devour his hair, his sleeves, the very inside of his nostrils. But the overpowering heaven of the smell was that which he had never experienced before, tendrils of sweetness, plucking at the memories of his journey. The roasted bitterness of myrrh, the mellow woody tinge of frankincense, the scent of flowers growing briefly in the dazzling landscape after a desert rain. It articulated his purpose and gave hope to his body. He longed to protect these words of the prophet Amos contained within,

People will stagger from sea to sea

And wander from north to east,

Searching for the word of the Lord,

But they will not find it.

I may not be the one to deliver these parchments, he thought, but they will not be lost. They will be found. And future peoples will hear His word. The word that I doubted for so long. The word that has set me free.

As the wax cooled, he prepared to melt the remainder of the jar so that he could pour it on top, submerging the books below its protective casing. He dropped a lit spill into the body of the jar and felt the warmth on his fingers as he rested them on the outside. The weight was more than he could bear as he arranged a lever, positioning his feeble weight so that he could press down upon it and tip the remainder onto them.

A jolt of enormous force threw him from his feet and knocked him against another chest behind him. Dazed, he lolled against the floor, feeling the wooden grain of the blasted planks slice his cheek. Bangs and shouts, firearms and slicing threats filled the air as heavy forms thumped their way into the cabin that had protected him. He crawled over to the lever as the floor above him erupted in a glory of flying wood and glaring light. He saw enough. A weight greater than he could imagine had fallen on the lever, the wax tipping in and the chest that he had longed to protect until it returned to English with glory and renown flooded with the protective covering that he hoped would preserve them.

Edmund shut his eyes and breathed no more.

Chapter 24 Day 30-31 Desert crossing

Thea felt safe like this, cocooned in vast swathes of black fabric, sitting next to another slightly larger covered figure in the open back of a white truck and packed in close with the rest of the taxi driver's family. They were all staring at her but she didn't mind. They'd done it, they were free.

Now, they looked like any other Egyptian family car making the trip to the dangerous wilds of Northern Sinai. This area was one that the foreign office

strongly advised travelers to avoid. Tucked away into popular sea and sand destinations like Sharm el-Sheik and Hurghada, flying in and out by low-budget airlines, tourists were rarely seen here.

'Well, we're on the run now for sure,' said Simon. 'Error 404 want us dead. The Logos haven't got the same resources as them. We need to get your manuscript back to where it belongs, give it to the monks there. They will know where to hide it. After that, who knows. Perhaps they will hide us for a while too.'

Thea nodded, looking up at the road ahead. It was smooth as far as she could see and the glint of sun off the waters of the Red Sea gave her hope that perhaps in the wilderness she would find a bit of peace. The nagging imminence of the desert prodded at her but she wasn't ready to do battle with it yet. In this place where her mother and brother had lost their lives, she would be relying on its remoteness to protect her but she didn't know if she could survive it.

'What are you doing in our vehicle?' asked a precocious voice next to her, cutting through her preoccupations with the land around her.

'You're helping us with our journey to our destination.' She said, trying to put it in terms that the child would understand. He looked at her with serious eyes, narrowing in suspicion as he looked up and down her outfit.

'These are my sister's clothes' he said, 'why are you covering yourself? Is it to fit in with our culture?'

Thea smiled, glad that her reactions could be hidden by the folds of surprisingly light fabric. 'Maybe that is it.'

'You are laughing at me,' the child said, 'but I have passed my exams with excellent one hundred percent achievement and I am second in my year at school. Tell me what you are doing.'

'I am running away from home,' Thea said, trying something else.

'Ah. I see. Is this man of your dreams you are running with?' He asked, nodding at Simon.

'Er, something like that,' she said, feeling the blood rushing to her cheeks as she realized that he could hear everything.

'How old are you?' she asked, trying to change the subject.

'Eleven. My name is Farouq. What is yours?'

'I am…' she realized that if she told him her name, they could use him to follow her. 'I am Mariam,' she said, thinking of the woman who had helped her get to Alboran. Although what was this boy going to tell Error 404? How would her name make any difference? How many European stowaways were escaping from Cairo right now?

The boy was preoccupied, unaware of her mental turmoil.

'I am going to be an engineer,' Farooq proclaimed eventually, 'not drive taxis like my brother.'

'You will be good at that I am sure,' said Thea, 'where will you study?'

'The University of Cairo.' Said Farooq, 'although I hope that there will not be another revolution soon. The last one prevented the students from studying. My brother was one of them. He could not afford to keep up once they had been striking and the teachers had stopped teaching. Do you have a brother?'

Thea sighed, changing the subject. 'Your English is very good.'

'Of course.' He said with a pleased smile on his face.

She thought of Edmund's writings and the Arabic on the back of it, the words she could not understand.

'Could you translate Arabic into English?'

'Yes, no problem. I do it every day at school.'

'I have something that I would like you to look at for me. Some Arabic that I would like to understand.'

Simon, sitting next to her, elbowed her. She turned to see him glare at her although it looked comical through the small rectangle of face available. Was he warning her about something? Was she being too trusting?

'It's fine,' she whispered. 'I've got to know what Musa's papers say. They may hold clues about the manuscript. About the monastery, about what we're walking into.'

He shrugged, 'I guess so. We're safe for now. This will work for a few days. I'm just not sure about what will happen next.'

The hours passed in a continuous blast of wind and sand as the truck roared and strained its way through the desert. Thea realized that her full body covering worked well, blocking out the dust and the dirt. Fine particles jostled their way in through a trellis of thick embroidery in front of her eyes but her hands were free beneath it to wipe them from the corners of her eyes. She kept them as tightly closed as she could.

When they stopped at a lonely petrol station, the driver opened the tailgate and they all unfolded stiff legs and climbed off the back. As Thea followed Simon down, he turned and held his hand out to steady her. She flinched, remembering the moment of distrust she had felt about him as he ran out of the Ben Ezra synagogue.

If he noticed, he didn't let it show. He turned to follow the others to the latrines behind the tiny shop. Thea got herself down from the truck and stood, stretching, thinking. So much had happened. She couldn't even work out how many days it had been since the bomb. How many days since she had last talked to Dad. She thought through it all, Grayson, Cambridge, her journey to Melilla, Mariam and Sadiq, finding the manuscripts under the wax in the chest and those four awful lonely days and nights on that cold island by herself.

Error 404 seemed to be everywhere. They were so intent on destruction. Where was the center of their operations? The finance behind them must be

massive. Where did it come from?

She held the rucksack close to her under the unruly niqab that billowed around her in the desert breeze. Protecting the missing documents of the Sinai Codex had become the only thing that mattered.

Dad wouldn't recognize her now. He'd be proud of her, she thought. His little girl, finally appreciating his ancient texts. If only they had spent more time together as a family. If only Mum and Finn were still alive. If only they hadn't gone to the desert. If only.

Well, she was here now.

She turned in a full circle, taking in the whole horizon of wind-whipped scrub, rock, and sand that made up the world around her. The sun was setting. She was assaulted by memories of setting the tents up, rolling out her sleeping bag, getting annoyed with Finn.

"Here," a voice behind her made her turn. Simon, offering her a bar of chocolate. She looked at him. He'd taken off his niqab and stood there looking dusty and tired, the reddening sun turning him into a dark shape.

She didn't feel like eating chocolate right now but took it anyway and turned from him. He couldn't even begin to understand what this place meant to her and she wasn't about to tell him. After visiting the smelly latrine, she returned to the truck. There was something very strange about the little girl she sat down next to. She gave out little high pitched noises, which was finally explained when a bulge on her back moved around to her shoulder, then disappeared again. Thea heard a giggle and the eyes through the embroidered grid of her garment crinkled with an unseen smile. The bulge moved down the legs and a tiny face peered out from beneath the hem of the dress. Little fingers clung onto the shoelaces and the fluffy body shook with black and white fur. A marmoset, hardly bigger than Thea's hand. She instinctively lent forward to touch it but a hand suddenly grabbed hers.

"No." She said, followed by a volley of Arabic which Thea did not understand.

"Okay." Thea held her hands up to show that she understood. The tiny monkey disappeared and she watched as the bulge returned up to nestle in the arms of the child.

"When will we stop again?" she asked the driver as he approached the cab.

He shrugged, "sometime."

She longed for a bed. For some peace. For all of this never to have happened. But for now, she just nodded and braced herself for more long hours of jolting hours of discomfort.

It must have been another few hours before they stopped again. Thea realized that she must have slept a little, crammed in so tightly that she had stayed upright. When the warmth of her companions left her, she stumbled stiffly out into the dark. Lights were already swinging over huge rolls of canvas, dragged from the truck. Thea realized that she had been sitting on one of them.

She would be sleeping in a tent in the desert.

How far away were they from the place where Mum and Finn had died? She couldn't possibly know. She had never asked and Dad had never told her. She just remembered more sand than this. It wasn't here, she reassured herself. It was nowhere near here. This wasn't anything like it, not the same. This tent was so different, a large round structure which all of them would sleep in, like a yurt. Not separating them in the Western way. Not worrying about privacy. All of them together, protecting each other.

This family began to feel like the one she had wanted after all this time. They took her on as their responsibility. They had no reason to, apart for money. Yet that didn't seem to matter to anyone. They were doing their job without questioning, without asking why.

Everyone seemed to know what to do and it was only a short time afterward that Thea was invited inside. They all sat in a chattering circle, passing around food that appeared from large plastic bags and a battered coolbox. Thea counted eleven of them in all, including herself and Simon. The taxi

driver who had originally helped them, two grown women and the rest children of various ages. So two families, really, but one purpose.

Although she didn't understand a word they were saying, she was content to immerse herself in the safety of it all. Farooq came and sat next to her.

"You don't understand what we are talking about?"

She shook her head. "Do I need to?"

"Maybe. We are talking about you and the man, Simon. We are asking each other questions and they want to know more but my brother is saying that we do not need to know."

He looked at her with a cheeky look in his eye, "I know that your story is that you are running away with your illegal boyfriend but we do not believe that." He tensed his lips and looked sideways at Simon.

"You do not seem to like him much. I think that if you were doing this for him, you would be a little bit more in love."

Thea breathed in, nervous that she could give away something that would put her in trouble again, something that would tell someone something that led more Error 404 operatives here to the place where she had felt safe at last.

"Love is complicated." She said eventually. "Maybe you will learn that one day."

Farooq nodded like an ancient sage. "Maybe." He said. "For now, do you want me to do the translation for you? Of the Arabic into English?"

Thea still needed to know what Musa's writings said but she was worried about giving too much away. What if the boy learned something important and didn't tell her? She would have to trust him.

"Okay, she said," pulling out her bag and finding the thick sheets of the diaries. "Have a look at this."

The boy took the sheaf of papers and automatically turned it onto its back, looking at Musa's even handwriting followed neat lines across the thick paper, the ink still rich and dark after five hundred years. He began following the writing from right to left down the paper, dry cuticles around his nails scraping lightly against the rough surface. When he reached the end of the first page, he blew out his cheeks.

"This is old, eh?" he said, looking at Thea in amazement.

"Why do you say that?" she asked.

It is talking about the Ottomans and they are traveling this very route that we are taking, here, across the Sinai! Look!" he translated into English as he read.

Following my eleven long years in the campaigns of the Great Emperor, I wish now to rest. My soul is weary of bloodshed and death. Now that I have been permitted to take leave, I have decided to devote some time to the exploration of the roots of my religion by seeking the pilgrimage sites of the prophet, peace be upon him.

I have decided to start by walking the ancient path of the peninsula that ends at the holy mountain of Sinai. When Muhammed was a young man, he spent time at the Christian monastery there, helping the monks and arranging protection for them. I have already met a returning pilgrim who tells me that Muhammed wrote a letter to the monks with a print of his hand and that this great treasure is displayed in the open library. I look forward to seeing this and venerating the prophet.

Farooq asked permission to turn the page. "I can continue?" Thea nodded.

Edmund, the knight, has accompanied me following his imprisonment after the battle of Preveza. He continues to be good company. We crossed onto the peninsula yesterday and have hired a Bedouin guide with his camels to help us followed the trail south during the long heat of the day. The terrain is not bad and the camels are not too uncomfortable. We camp tonight by the first oasis on the trail which has everything we need. I will try to barter

for a goat with the next herdsmen we meet so that it can be slaughtered by my servants for a roasting feast tomorrow.

"You know the travel across this place has been the same throughout the centuries and my people are the only ones who were relied on to provide safe passage."

"I thought that the Bedouin were dangerous," said Thea.

"Well, you had better get away from us. My family is all Bedouin!" Farooq laughed, holding his arms out wide. "Just because we do not travel by camel right now doesn't mean we have changed our ancestry."

Farooq turned the next page of the diaries, preparing to read further but Thea stopped him. The lamp that had been lit to help them settle in the tent was now being turned down so that they did not waste fuel while they slept.

"Thank you," she whispered, "perhaps you can read me some more tomorrow."

"Pleasure," smiled the boy, clearly proud of himself.

The rest of the group were already in their sleeping places, their legs pointing into the center to leave a little more room for their heads, arranging themselves like the spokes of a wheel. The women were all one side and the men the other. Simon looked as though he had already gone to sleep. Thea lay down beside the two adult women and tried to get comfortable on the uneven ground. She began to wish that it was more like the soft sand of the place where they had camped before but then those thoughts turned and berated her, angry that she could think that. Her tired brain complained back, accusing and torn. These turbulent thoughts would not let her sleep, despite her exhaustion. Snores echoed from others and she heard the little marmoset chattering away to itself. At least there was noise. She didn't think that she would be able to bear the silence without others here.

She must have slept because she dreamed of a cave, of being forced to endure a long time without food. The colors of the cave dazzled her with yellows and orange-browns. She woke in a cold sweat and listened in the

darkness to the familiar snoring. The discomfort she felt insisted that she got up and relieve herself outside but she couldn't bring herself to do it. If she didn't, she knew she would not get back to sleep, she would need to go and yet she felt so afraid. What if something happened outside and no-one knew? What if she wandered off and couldn't find her way back?

She would not go outside.

She did sleep but the dream this time was fitful and far too vivid. She was in a sandstorm, out of the tent and she couldn't see. Her leg was trapped and would not move. Figures ran at her out of the haze and landed blows on her but she didn't know where they were coming from. She called for Dad, for Mum, but she knew they were not there, that they would never come for her.

She sobbed into the sand but the pressure of it on her nostrils forced her up again and the howling wind took her, covering her with soft, warmth and drowsy darkness.

Then she was awake properly and suddenly and everyone was up and pulling down the tent which was falling in folds onto her.

"Come," they said, shaking her legs, "it is time to go."

Chapter 25 Day 31, Saint Catherine's Monastery

"Today we will reach the monastery. It is not far."

It felt like they were off on a trip to a Bible theme park. Mostly it came back in snatches from Sunday School sessions, Moses going up and getting the ten commandments, the burning bush where he had to take his sandals off, Moses breaking the tablets and having to go back up to get more. Mount Sinai, cloud, thunder, and doom.

"Have you been to Saint Catherine's Monastery before?" asked Farooq.

"Er, no…have you?" Thea was puzzled. How did this kid know so much?

"We have taken tourists there before. It is very popular."

"Okay if you're so clever, tell me what you know."

Farooq sat up bolt upright as though he was performing a recitation. "There are records of a site of religious worship at the base of Mount Sinai ever since the Fourth century AD when it was visited and documented by a female traveler by the name of Egrea who remarked on the hermits living in the caves of the mountains surrounding a little chapel erected at the place of the original bush. A few hundred years later, the Roman Emperor Justinian I received complaints from the monks that they were being attacked too often by wild nomads. Justinian took these monks seriously and built them a fortress with walls three meters thick, surrounding their precious chapel and protecting the bush."

"You have an incredible memory," interrupted Thea. Farooq looked at her nodding, without stopping,

"He dedicated it to his wife, Theodora."

Thea almost choked. That was her name, long changed to the shortened version, last used by Grayson at Dad's funeral. Theodora Agnes Summers. Unbelievably flowery and Victorian. She stopped again. That Victorian lady, one of the twin lady-travelers - she was called Agnes. Was it a coincidence..? Could he have?

Farooq wasn't stopping. "The library at Saint Catherine's Monastery is, the oldest lending library in the world, where thousands of ancient documents, codices, parchment, papyrus, have been stored and well-preserved for over twelve hundred years. The monastery has never faced destruction in the form of a fire, never experienced the gentle decline of an old fashioned idea in an uninterested world. It is said that Mohammed himself worked at the monastery in his youth, leaving a letter signed with his handprint in thanks to the monks and all he had learned from them."

He stopped to draw breath and looked out of the truck at the road ahead, at the horizon with the southern sun still high above their destination. Perhaps he too was thinking about Musa, about the diary, about how the things he had learned by rote were backed up by the five-hundred-year-old Ottoman writing. Maybe he was thinking about how he could bring that into his little speech.

"It's very useful to hear all this," Farooq, Simon said, leaning over from the opposite side of the truck, "are you usually paid for being such a terrific guide?"

"Of course," he said with a gleam in his eye, "ten US dollars."

Simon laughed and leaned back, "you'll have to talk for a bit longer if you want that payment, my friend," he said.

Farooq took him at his word and continued, "For as long as it has existed, Saint Catherine's Monastery has been vulnerable not to violent aggression but to quiet looters. The treasures within its library have been taken, the innocence and trusting nature of the monks have been exploited, leaving the monastery with a fraction of the wonderful items it should contain."

Thea thought immediately of Musa, taking the two Sinai Codex documents from the library in 1539 so that they would not be destroyed by Bedouin raiders.

"Excuse me," Thea said, "some of those items were taken for their protection…"

Farooq frowned at her. He had not yet finished.

"One of these such thieves is a German man called Constantin Tischendorf who stole the Codex now known as the Sinaiticus in 1859. He took it under the pretense of borrowing it to make a copy and then never brought it back, instead taking it to Russia where he sold it to the Tsar. It was a worldwide proof of the early Bible, with the date decided as the middle of the fourth century. Scholars were stunned into realizing that the Bible was not put together in the middle ages. That was not the end of the adventures of the

Codex Sinaiticus. Stalin sold it in 1933 to the British Library in London, England for one hundred thousand British pounds because of his need to raise money for his impoverished regime in Russia."

Thea felt the weight of the document on her knees and sudden grief in her heart that made her start to cry privately under her niqab. Tischendorf had started something that had ended with her father dying. If he hadn't taken it, deceiving the monks like that, maybe Dad would still be alive. He wouldn't have spent his life looking after it. Logos or no Logos, perhaps they still wouldn't even know about it.

Could returning this manuscript start to make things a little better again?

The truck eventually turned into a dusty car park filled with the fumes of minivans and taxis. The shadows were short and Thea could feel the hot sun beating down onto the top of her head. She longed for some shade.

As the others performed their now customary stretches, hobbling off the truck with stiff limbs, Thea noticed that Simon had removed his niqab and was jogging towards the monastery in the hot sun. A few minutes later, she could see him heading back, red-faced, his underarms already dark with sweat.

"It's closing soon, we have to get in there now!" he shouted. She reflected as she jogged after him that they could be any visiting tourists, anxious to complete their sightseeing in good time. Except that they made an unlikely Muslim couple. Thea wanted to keep her covering on because it hid her rucksack with its precious treasure. What would they think when they saw it? Would they recognize it? Would they believe her?

It made her smile to think that she was returning a very overdue library book. The fines were going to be astronomical.

She said goodbye as Simon bought tickets and they passed through the first arch without being stopped. Inside the monastery walls, there was a quiet but purposeful buzz of activity, the narrow paths filled with people from every nationality taking photos and selfies. There were many religious

groups, too. Crowds of bright white nuns and bearded monks of every age flocked past them in black robes with flat black hats.

"Which way to the library?" Simon asked, just as a bell tolled.

"Over there," Thea pointed along the path they were on, seeing a signpost.

The entrance to the library was modern and seemed out of place in the ancient surroundings. A plaque revealed that it was a recently reopened and developed, part of the upgraded section of the complex that had received a great deal of money from many religious organizations, including Christian, Jewish and Muslim groups.

The interior felt so cool. A security man on the front desk greeted them. "We are about to close but there are a few minutes left for your viewing pleasure. You could use your few short minutes perhaps to view some of our most important treasures. Some few pages of the Sinai Codex discovered in 1979? The Sinai Palimpsest, a Syriac set of the gospels from the second century?"

Thea smiled, wanting the man to know that they were not tourists, that they were more important than that. "I have something urgent to tell the authorities here," she said to the thickset man who frowned at her defensively.

"I am authority."

"Someone who knows about texts. About the Sinai Codex."

"We have pages on display in library. It is there, enjoy."

"Is there someone I can talk to, please?" Her heart thumped hard. She couldn't go into the library with the text, it felt like going into a store with a product that she had already bought but without a receipt. What if they thought she had stolen it?

"We close soon. You make a choice now."

Simon clutched at her arm and steered her away from the desk, indicating a monk who had just walked in. He wore a small, neat badge with some Arabic alongside the words 'Custodian'.

"Excuse me…" said Simon.

"I cannot stop, I am very busy…" mumbled the man, trying to disappear into an office.

"Please," urged Thea, "I have something for you, something valuable, you need to see this, please."

The monk paused and raised an eyebrow. "A few seconds only."

Thea breathed in deeply, lowering her voice to a whisper so that no-one else could hear. "It is a missing part of the Sinai Codex that was hidden by my family. I want to give it back to you."

The monk's face shifted through the emotions of anger, then doubt and finally wonder. He turned to a door and unlocked it.

"Come in here," he said, "let me see what you have."

Thea closed behind her. She removed her niqab and the monk flinched.

"I am not a Muslim, it's fine," Thea said. She took off the rucksack and laid it gently on the table. Undoing the straps, her fingers fumbled at the buckles and she realized that her hands were shaking. She breathed in deeply, nervous about how the Custodian might react when he saw it.

She looked at Simon who had his back to them, hands on hips, glancing nervously out of a small window.

"My ancestor visited this place in 1539. He was a knight, on pilgrimage from fighting in the Ottoman wars. He and his friend took the manuscript from this place because the Bedouin were attacking, they thought it would be destroyed." She paused, not wanting to vilify Edmund. "This is what he took."

No, Thea, she wanted to correct herself, this is *part* of what he took. The rest was destroyed when you shot Brian.

She pulled out the Codex, along with the now-familiar waft of sweet-smelling perfumed wax. The deep rich scent infused everything she had touched and it had become a reminder to her of the moment she had first seen the yellow swathes of wax in the torchlight of the tunnel on Alboran island. She laid the books on the desk, leaving the pages written by Edmund and Musa in the bag.

The dark eyes of the monk widened behind his glasses.

"Is it true?" he whispered, "we had been told that all was destroyed in the bombs. London, Cambridge, Leipzig, Russia…" he opened the cover reverently and the pages cracked slightly as the wax shifted in the binding. The uncial script stood out dark and enduring. He put on a cloth glove and stroked the parchment.

"So," he said in a whisper, "you have come home."

They stood in silence for a few moments as the monk examined the pages thoroughly. He knows his manuscripts, Thea realized, becoming less nervous and more excited. Not like Archbishop Mar Samuel in Jerusalem in 1947, who didn't even recognize the importance of the old scroll of Isaiah.

The Custodian got business-like. "Stay here," he said, picking up the Codex and turning abruptly. "Do not leave. We need you to record what has happened to this and the journey it has taken. For its provenance."

He let himself out of the office and Thea looked at Simon, who had turned from the window and seemed to be thinking the same thoughts as her.

"We leave it here," he said, "then we disappear properly, just as Grayson wanted us to."

She nodded, feeling the weight lift. Rolling her shoulders, she let out the stiffness that had taken root in them during the time she had carried the heavy pages. "How about a holiday in Sharm-el Sheik?" she asked, "beach,

sun, crystal clear water, snorkeling. I could learn to dive! I've always wanted to do that."

Simon breathed evenly, pursing his lips. "I think we'll need to go a bit further away from here than that," he said grimly.

"Come on," Thea said, "we don't have to wait for them to come back, let's go now!" she moved to the door and tried to open it but the door wouldn't open.

She shook it. "I don't understand, maybe it's stiff."

"It's not stiff." Simon said with an edge to his voice, "he locked it."

She gave the door a couple of thumps, thinking about the tourists in the library on the other side, then remembering that it was now after closing time. Why would he take the manuscript and lock them in? The adrenaline that tried to flow into her muscles, giving her some fight, gave up against the flood of disappointment that Thea felt right now.

"I'm doing them a favor! Can't they see that?" She lent against the wall and sank to the floor. "Why can't anyone do the decent thing?"

"Maybe we should think of it more as a blessing. We don't have to be responsible for it anymore. We're the ones who've done the decent thing, at least. We've brought it back to where it belongs."

"We? Why are you persisting with the 'We' right now?"

"We're in this together, aren't we? I'm here with you in this locked office for the same reason as you are. Someone is on their way to talk to us and it might be the sort of someone that we don't want to talk to. So if you want me to help you through whatever is going to happen next, you'll need us to be 'we' for a little longer."

Thea rolled her eyes at him but underneath, she knew he was right.

"What do you think is going to happen?"

"I've just got here too, you know?" Simon said, his frustration snarling at her.

Thea turned away from him and stepped over to the window, looking out as Simon had done before. She saw a group of monks, dressed in the same black robes and black squashed flat hats as the man who had brought them here. They looked purposeful and a little chaotic, as though this wasn't their normal business. A single bell began to toll out of sight above them. It sounded insistent, growing more sonorous and deafening. The monk group turned down a path away from the library and disappeared into the front of a small chapel. Other similarly dressed monks hurried towards the same place.

"It's because of us," Thea breathed, "I bet they're having an emergency meeting because of the document we've brought back to them."

Chapter 26 Day 31, Sinai

It seemed like hours had passed before a key turned in the lock and the door opened. Simon jumped up, looking to Thea as though he was ready to defend her as three monks, including the Custodian, walked in. The tiny office felt even more cramped and Thea felt a laugh bubble up at the ridiculous number of people in such a small room. No-one knew which way to face or where to look.

"Who exactly are you?" the Custodian asked Thea, "What do you want with the Sinai Codex?"

Thea couldn't understand. "I gave it to you! I brought it back? It's for this place, this library, it belongs here!"

"So you say." The Custodian said, his face tense.

Thea felt bereft. Utterly confused and deflated. She felt like a cat presenting its owner with a dead bird, hoping for praise and getting anger.

One of the others put his hand on the Custodian's shoulder. He had control over the room, a calm authority respected by the others. He wore glasses

without a steel rim, giving him a modern look.

"The arrival of this text has changed everything for our community." He said, his thick accent sliding the words together like syrup. "We are deeply grateful." He looked around at the other two. The Custodian raised his chin slightly in a mixture of pride and honor. "And yet it seems a little too good to be true. Forgive us, but we need to ask you many questions before we can believe it."

Simon pushed his hand through his hair and Thea noticed that it was unwashed, slightly greasy and his fingernails were dirty. "We've traveled a long way to get this document to you," he said quietly, "we have been pursued by a group who want it destroyed."

"Error 404."

"So you know them?"

"Of course. We have a longwave radio BBC World Service. Terrorism all over the world. But not here. Not yet." The Custodian frowned. "Then you two arrive with something that looks like Sinai Codex pages." What else you have in bag? Bombs?"

Simon flinched, his face crumpled in disbelief. "Think of it this way. If we belonged to Error 404, why would we bring it here? We would have destroyed it already!"

"Maybe you hope to destroy it at a place where there are other valuable items to destroy at the same time. There are many motives, many reasons why a man may come bearing gifts."

"So you were expecting them to come. Even before we turned up."

There was a thick silence in the room. The three monks exchanged glances.

"Maybe," said the Custodian, "we trust no-one apart from each other."

"I am Nikolai," said the monk with the rimless glasses, "I have worked here all my life. I came here as a boy to help tend the gardens before taking

orders and giving everything I have to protect the ancient things that this place represents."

"You can trust us." Said Thea, "I know how I can prove this to you." She turned to the tiny desk by the wall and picked up a pencil and a scrap of paper. "The knight I told you of? Sir Edmund? He belonged to a group made up of knights and others who devoted themselves to preserving the word of God. Although he carried these books away from here, his purpose was not to steal the Codex but to preserve it." She drew a line on the paper then paused. "Through the ages, my descendants have committed themselves to the same cause. My father himself…" she paused, realizing for the first time the immensity of what she was saying, realizing the power of the cause that she had inherited, that she was right now assisting, "…my own father died for that same cause."

She took the pencil and had the attention of every eye in the room as she put its point down in the middle of the line she had already drawn and pulled it across the paper to create the Greek letter lambda.

The gasp that accompanied her action told her that they knew exactly what it meant.

"The Logos," Nikolai whispered. "So." He put out his hand and Thea extended hers. He clasped it and enclosed it with his other hand, shaking it with enthusiasm and warmth. "It seems that you are indeed one of us."

It was late. Darkness had fallen several hours before and as she sat at the Custodian's table in the Refectory eating a delicious lamb stew, Thea looked around at the gathered company. There were only five of them, the same five who had crammed into the tiny office earlier that day. They were seated apart from the rest of the monks and nuns who ate in separate areas. The day had passed with intense interrogation about the Codex and how she had found it, about Edmund's journey and her father's devotion to finding out where it might be. About Error 404, Daran Garayan and more. Simon was taken to a different room for his interview, perhaps to explore areas that she wasn't aware of.

"And you," Nikolai had asked her, "what is the nature of your faith?"

Thea had stared right back at him, unblinking. "I don't have one."

"Your parents brought you up Christian?"

"Of course. That is what they wanted for me. My mother taught me, prayed with me, took me to church."

"But you said that she passed away?"

"When I was eleven years old."

"So, after that?"

"Dad wasn't around much. I went to boarding school. Dad always asked if I'd go with him but I always said no."

"Did you know of his connections with the Logos?"

"Not until after his death. His friend told me, a professor at Cambridge University…"

"Professor Grayson?"

"You know him?"

"Your father talked of him often."

"You knew my father?"

"He involved us in his search for the very manuscripts that you have now brought us. I guess you could say that he trained you well."

Thea shook her head, forcing herself to imagine Dad here. Perhaps this was where he was during some of those times when she wondered where he'd gone.

"We are glad that you have come, Thea Summers. Your father was honored here. He had a permanent workspace within the library where many valuable books are kept. Would you like to see it?"

Thea's heart thumped hard as she followed him to the darkened library, now closed to visitors. He carried a torch which, though powerful, only lit up parts of the rooms they went through. They walked down a maze of corridors.

"This new building was developed with money from Logos supporters. Everyone thinks that it is designed to impress tourists but it has a much more important purpose."

"You are the oldest lending library in the world. You have thousands of scrolls and parchments that have been here for over twelve hundred years," she said, parroting Farooq.

"Yes, this is all true, but again, not our most important reason for being here. Error 404 was not a surprise to us. It has been expected, this turning against religion, this desire to destroy the oldest documents that we have, that point to the integrity of God's word. The Logos knew it would happen eventually."

"So why did they allow the most important documents to be displayed so visibly? In the museums and libraries around the world?"

"The Logos were present wherever the earliest documents were stored. Making sure that they were informed as much as possible about the earliest manuscripts, cataloging them, studying them, talking about them, letting people know of their authenticity, protecting the truth."

"But that is how Error 404 knew where they were. In the end, it didn't help anyone! Those documents are all dust now, all destroyed. Their mission has completely failed! How can anyone now find proof that the Biblical text we have in our modern translations is anywhere near the texts that were originally written? We can't."

Nikolai had stayed strangely quiet as she talked. They had reached a door which he opened using a key which he handed to her. "This is your father's workspace. See if you can work out what he was doing here."

The office was as small as his space at the British Library and just as cluttered but missing a computer on the desk. She sat down, running her hands over the smooth, worn arms of the wooden chair and felt the now-familiar prick of tears as she looked around at the many photos of herself and her family adorning the walls. He'd kept her with him all those years. The photos weren't just of her when she was little. There were photos of her throughout her life.

"Why did he spend so much time here?" she asked. "He could have been working at home. He didn't need to be away."

"Your father needed access to the primary texts."

"But they had them! Back in Cambridge, London!"

"Did they?"

Thea pulled a face at his riddles. She was worn out and couldn't fix her thoughts. Was this necessary?

"There is a secret that the Logos protect. We have decided that you should know about it. But you will need to promise that what I am about to show you will continue to stay a secret, however much you wish to share it with others. However much it hurts you or causes misunderstandings in your life."

Thea was exhausted. She couldn't imagine what it would be. Part of her hoped that her father himself would be sitting behind a door somewhere, alive. Since that was her most profound hope, she knew that disappointment was inevitable.

"Okay, I promise." She said, without enthusiasm.

"I will keep you to your promise. Now, follow me," said Nikolai.

They went down more stairs, circling round and round, then along a very long corridor which seemed to go on forever until they came to a modern-looking chamber. Nikolai flicked a switch that lit a blindingly white space.

A hum began to develop somewhere outside of her consciousness, very softly, to begin with, then rising to an uncomfortable buzz. Bio-hazard suits hung on hooks along the wall, next to a glass chamber with complicated-looking equipment ranged around it. Thea started to make sense of where she was.

Hundreds of miles away from the nearest modern city, dug deep into the side of the mountain where God had appeared to Moses, she was looking at futuristic technology with the grade of a nuclear bunker. They hadn't even got electricity throughout the monastery and yet down here they looked like they were equipped for some sort of extinction event.

"We need to put these on," Nikolai said. "Find one that fits."

Thea was on automatic. She picked a bio-suit that looked like her size and zipped herself up, fitting the helmet with its gas mask onto it.

"Come." Nikolai's voice sounded through an intercom inside her helmet and they stepped into the nearest open glass chamber. A couple of seconds after the door had swung closed, there was a hissing sound and a light mist coated her suit.

"We are now going into a nil-microbe environment."

The door opened into a vast space with a low ceiling and as they stepped into it and walked forward, the floor lit up, flickering on in the sector they had entered, turning off as they moved away. The surfaces of the low tables were lit with a weird purple glow. Each one supported an ancient document, a parchment, a papyrus, a scroll. Thea couldn't tell how many there were in the space but she was aware of it going on for a long distance every way she looked.

"What are all of these?" she asked. "Are these documents that no-one knows about?"

"Come and see," Nikolai said, leading her to one nearest them. The uncial script, the wooden covering with beads of perfumed wax. She couldn't

smell anything through the mask but she knew what she was looking at. The missing part of the Sinai Codex that she had brought to them.

"This is our newest arrival," he said, smiling. "We thank you for it."

She extended her gloved hand to it, touching the edge of the binding, recalling the adventures that this text had experienced since being here last. It had traveled by camel across the desert, pitched and tossed across the sea in the ship of a Corsair, then lain safely protected and enclosed in sweet-smelling wax for five hundred years.

"There was another one with it until very recently," she said quietly, "I'm sorry to have lost it."

There was a pause before Nikolai's voice crackled back through the intercom in her ear. "This could so easily have followed the fate of the other. You did well."

He moved towards another table, "I wonder if you might recognize this one, too." A small label said simply, "Codex Sinaiticus." The pages were laid out individually and she was able to pick them up with her gloved hands, to turn them over and see the script on both sides of the page.

She felt her heart miss a beat. Was it a mistake?

"This is impossible," she whispered. "It no longer exists."

"The copy no longer exists," he said. "The real original most definitely does."

She turned around, walking quickly to another table, unable to believe what she was looking at. The thought it was the very same document that she had examined with Grayson that night in the Divinity department in Cambridge, before witnessing his death.

"The Bezae, the Chester Beatty, the Vaticanus, they're all here. These are the originals. Kept safe in a place where they will properly survive."

"Why are you showing me this?" Thea felt suddenly terrified. "Are you not afraid that this will all be destroyed too? Why are you trusting me?"

"You check out fine. You may not know what you believe but we know where your loyalties lie. You loved your father, even though he could not always be there for you. You deserve to know the truth."

"Because the truth will set me free."

"Where did you hear that?"

"Jesus said it, didn't he?"

"Yes, he did. Will you listen more to Him?"

Thea gritted her teeth. This was a little too much. "Please, one thing at a time. This is only just sinking in. So my father came here to study the original texts. They still exist. The bombs that destroyed the exhibits around the world only got rid of the fakes, is that what you're saying?"

"Not fakes. Good copies. Copies that satisfied anyone who looked close enough. We have an excellent set of scribes who know the same skills of those who did the work originally, a long time ago. Everything is real. Everything that has been reproduced exists in the same format as the originals, but these delicate and vulnerable manuscripts are protected, safe, in this bunker, allowed to survive while mankind goes mad in the world beyond our walls."

"Can I tell Simon?"

"No. You promised, remember. No-one."

"Why not, don't you trust him?"

"Not yet," said Nikolai.

Chapter 27 Day 31-32 Chapel of the Burning Bush

When she returned upstairs, Simon had gone to his room in the guesthouse. Thea wondered what he had been told if anything. She was shown to her room, small and plain with barely enough room for the single bed. The windows were shuttered. She battled with them, catching her finger on the metal strut as she tried to lever it open, then gave up, worrying that others might be kept awake by the noise.

Instead, she took the small towel from the foot of her bed, found the bathroom and showered in cold water, watching the rust-colored water flow from her, taking the ingrained sand of the desert with it. Despite having no soap or shampoo, she rinsed her hair and felt it heavy and lank between her fingers. She hadn't looked in a mirror for a while and there wasn't one here. The lack of modern convenience contrasted so strongly with the futuristic facility down below her that she began to think that she had imagined it all.

Her thoughts tumbled and turned as she tried to find a comfortable position in the hard bed. She couldn't remember when she had last managed to sleep through a whole night. Her body clock had been torn apart. She thought back to those days before the bomb, to her everyday existence at work, in a range of different offices doing work she didn’t care about and realized that she couldn't remember a night, even then, when she had managed to settle, to be calm, to fall asleep without hurtling, crazy thoughts attacking her from all sides.

She'd been caught up in a vortex of fear and running and discomfort and survival which should have been the reason for her frightening mind-world right now, but she knew that whatever the events of the last few weeks might have been, she would not have found relief. Not even in her bed, in the comfort and safety of the flat.

She wasn't going to sleep. She felt the cold air seep between the shutters. Perhaps there was a window somewhere else. She was suddenly consumed by the need to see the desert sky, to look at the stars. It contrasted with the

previous night in the tent where they had all slept together and she had felt too afraid to even get out and relieve herself. Now, she was in a building, she was enclosed within walls of a fortress, a protected place that had endured for over one thousand years, where she was kept safe. It felt different. She couldn't be touched.

Thea put her clothes on and picked up her rucksack out of habit. It still contained the diary by Edmund with the Arabic writing by Musa on the other side, as well as the book of letters from the Chief Rabbi in Cairo and the things that her Dad had packed, *Just in Case* . She hooked one strap over her shoulder and let herself out of the room, exploring the guesthouse corridors. Still unable to find a window, she followed a flight of stairs that led up to a door that opened onto a flat roof.

Once, when she was about thirteen, Dad had taken her to a football match in a huge stadium. She had never been to such a large event. This act of opening the door, of seeing the stunning wonder of the sight before her, reminded her of walking up the steps into the stadium.

The brilliance of the multiple universes scattered wantonly across the purple expanse, the velvet texture of dark, light, and gold, stunned her. The brightest stars picked themselves out like lights on a Christmas tree and the swathes of the Milky Way ran charging through the heavens, proud and free. It was a miraculous and beautiful sight, made even more dramatic by the famous mountain picked out regal and glorious, rising above her, dark against the relentless beauty of the sky. Sinai. Horeb. Jebel Musa. The final destination of so many religiously motivated pilgrims throughout the ages. What had happened here, she wondered. When Moses went up there? When the base of the mountain was surrounded by cloud, fire, and smoke? When the seventy-two elders saw God?

The dark mass of the cliffs above her said nothing but spoke loudly to her. They intimidated her with their endless enduring, their ever presence.

Was God here? Had Moses seen the bush burn without being consumed? Had a voice really come from it? He was a shepherd out here on his own, she recalled, the stories from the Old Testament etched infallibly into her memory, redrawn and redefined by the re-tellings that defined her

childhood. Moses had come out here to the desert, driven away from his home in Egypt when he killed an Egyptian who had been mistreating one of the Israelites, his people. Moses had also been an orphan, she recalled. Like she was now. Adopted by the Pharoah's daughter, brought up in the royal household, but never really fitting in, never really belonging to the opulent and lavish life that he had been given. Instead, he had taken up the cause of those who he identified with more strongly.

And he had ended up here. Being told by "I AM" that he had a job to do. That he would be back here under very different circumstances. Leading his people out of slavery.

It had happened.

She thought of all of those documents underground, preserved in their nil-biotic climate. Testifying to the fact that it wasn't a load of fairytales.

She lay down on the roof and stared at the stars. They silently witnessed to Him. To the great I AM. They shouted at her about his glory and majesty and splendor. Without saying anything, they insisted to her in no uncertain terms that He, the creator, had started all of this. They told her that this infinite beauty and power and delight would never end and that His presence with her was an absolute finite fact.

Her heart pounded within her as she realized that she couldn't deny any of it, that at this moment, He was powerfully real.

When the knocking persisted and drove her eyes open, Thea realized that she had slept dreamlessly and deeply and sharp beams of daylight picked on her through the shutters.

"Morning prayer!" the female voice said. "Ten minutes!"

It didn't sound like she was being informed; it was more of a command.

The chapel that the monks were entering was the Chapel of the Burning Bush, or the Chapel of Saint Helena, named after Empress Helena who was

said to have commissioned it in 337AD, mother of Constantine the Great, at the site where Moses had seen the burning bush.

As part of their tradition, they took their shoes off as they entered, to recognize the instruction given to Moses, to remove his sandals because the place where he was standing was holy ground.

The bush that flowed over the entrance to the chapel looked straggly and unkempt. It was clear to Thea that bits had been cut off without much care. Tourists, she thought, wanting a memento. She thought about the superstition it represented, venerating a twig or a leaf that would shrivel and die, maybe being placed in a frame or a special case, used as a talisman, promising God's presence, reminding of his holiness.

She couldn't relate to that. Passing into the cool, tiny interior of the chapel, she saw that it was already full and a chant had begun, led by the monk at the front, facing the same direction, packed in close together. The monk at the front concluded the singing and Thea recognized Nikolai as he turned to face the rest of them.

"As you know, this is a special meeting. We have an opportunity to discuss the new threat that has been issued for this area."

Thea's heart thumped. Was she the threat? Surely she would not have been allowed in if she was.

"I would like to welcome our visitor, Thea Summers." The monks turned and nodded at her, making approving noises. "Thea, many of these men knew your father very well and they mourn his passing with you. They would like to extend their sympathy for the loss in your life that you have faced over these days and the difficulties that you have faced in finishing his search for the treasure that you brought us."

The monks nearest to her extended their hands in greeting and patted her on the shoulder, smiling in sympathy.

"We have found through our research that we can trust you. Unfortunately, the same is not true for your companion, Simon."

Thea felt a chill run through her. She couldn't focus for a moment and her face must have given her away because Nikolai responded.

"The threat is from the global terror organization known as Error 404. We cannot be sure that Simon is not working for them yet. As soon as we know for sure, no-one is to trust him. Please, extend kindness and the generosity that we are committed to in our order. I will continue to give updates through this time of prayer every morning."

"The level of threat has been repeated many times for the Sinai peninsula but intelligence has revealed that our monastery has been mentioned in exchanges between known members of the organization." Nikolai looked sober. "Our monastery has never been destroyed. Despite centuries, millennia of life here in this barren, remote place, the outer walls, build three meters thick by the Roman Emporer, have never been breached. We have always been respected. We have always attributed this to the fact that we are a site of religious significance. Christians, Jews, and Muslims all have reasons to revere this place. Every wave of occupation has embraced this place and left it in peace. Until now. Until the main threat that we face is the force that rejects the idea of God completely, that seeks to destroy the foundations of faith."

"What is expected?" a quiet voice asked from the middle of the group.

"If they come here, they will want to take our history, our library. This might mean a bomb similar to those they used in the museums already hit around the world. They approached those places with stealth, undercover, which is why we are suspicious of Simon Derridge. He has nothing with him that could achieve such destruction but he might be ready to communicate with those who do. Please, be vigilant."

Thea thought of the empty, blackened rooms of the British Library. Even if the real Codex hadn't been there after all, even if it was just a copy, her father had been protecting something that he gave his life for.

She didn't want to be here in the Monastery if someone was aiming to destroy it. Perhaps they would not succeed in destroying the real documents hidden in the bunker below them, not even realizing how close they came to

the real treasure of this place, but they might take her out as they tried. She didn't want to be here when they did.

This wasn't her fight anymore.

"I'm very grateful for your welcome and hospitality," she said to Nikolai afterward the service, as they walked from the chapel back to the library, "but now that I have given you the manuscript, I'm going to leave now."

He nodded, "But where will you go? You cannot return home."

"I'm sorry, I am frightened by the thought that they might be coming here. That I might be here when they do."

"Yes, it is disturbing but we trust God to protect us."

"I find that more difficult to do. I just feel so vulnerable here," she confessed, lowering her voice, "if Error 404 is coming here, I don't want to be anywhere near those manuscripts."

Nikolai nodded, understanding. "If you need to go, then so be it. But before you do, please visit the top of the mountain," he said. Thea looked up instinctively at the bulk of the rock reaching above them, the sun bleaching its subtle shadows as it climbed into the mid-morning sky, "spend some time up there. It is a place of blessing."

As Thea left him to return to her room, she began to sweat and her thoughts tumbled out of control. What if they were here, in the monastery grounds right now? What if the people walking into the library right in front of her, climbing up the stairs and walking on the second level, what if they were bringing a bomb in? She was filled with a conviction that someone was here to blow the place up. She needed to get out.

She pushed her way through the external door and clutched the rucksack to her stomach, feeling as though she wanted to be sick. The air smelled like a sauna, burnt with an edge of herbs from the carefully trimmed flowerbeds bordering the path beside her. The sun was climbing even higher as she

pushed her way out of the main entrance, finding herself in the main car park, searching for the way up.

Chapter 28 Day 32, Dream on the Mountain

Signposts pointed along the stony red path, giving two options, the Camel trail or the 3700 steps. The Camel Trail was longer, designed for animals to negotiate as they carried the lazier tourists who didn't want to exert themselves.

She turned up the path that led to the steps of repentance. A couple of hours, she thought it would take, to get to the top. With the sun that was rising, ever-hot, up and over her head, it would probably take longer. Now would be the time to turn back and get some water. She would need it. Not as much as I need to be on my own, to lose this panic, she thought. There was a shop at the top, perhaps there would be some people hawking bottles of water on the way up.

There didn't seem to be anyone around. The most popular time to use this path was early morning, before the sun rose, a while ago now. All the tourists had been and gone for the day. With the double benefit of a cool ascent and a magical view at the top, she could see the attraction of getting up early.

She climbed, taking the steps steadily, planting her feet firmly, deliberately, trying not to rush, pulling at the reserves of mental strength that she needed so desperately to come to terms with the feelings of anxiety, the panic that she hated, that she had longed for so long to be rid of.

The path of steps twisted around the mountain, purposefully leading her up, away from danger. Whether real or not, she couldn't be down there anymore. It was too dangerous.

She began to enjoy being outside, being on her own. She turned and saw that she could look down into the valley, straight down at the monastery

itself. It looked so peaceful and calm, nestled in the valley. It had been there for so long, holding so much precious material. Protecting so much history.

She thought about the stars and the extent of the universe, the way she had been struck by the awesome power and strength of the Creator God during the night when she had seen the purple gold brilliance of everything hanging above the world. Such perfection and precision, she thought, creating all that up there and so, she supposed, all this down here as well.

She stopped and felt her breathing, struggling to draw breath against the energy and effort she had been putting into the steps as she climbed. Every breath, she remembered, God our Creator gives every breath. She thought back to the morning service in the Chapel of the Burning Bush, taking her shoes off because of the holy ground. She wasn't walking here on this holy mountain because she belonged here. No-one could belong here.

She felt the weight of everything that had happened up until now.

Each step became an articulation of sorrow at the state of her heart, her absence of love or care or concern for anything that didn't have her benefit as her goal.

The day seemed so bright, clear, safe. Everything around here spoke of geographical beauty, an age-old tradition, a set of beliefs that may or may not be true. Her experience of this sort of deep thinking was that it usually heralded a more panicked, anxious set of thought patterns but this time she sensed something new.

She felt energized as she strode up the steps, wanting to find out what there was at the top, wanting to know what the Steps of Repentance led to. She knew it was more special than she had ever given it credit for. Knew that a God who created stars like the ones she witnessed last night could not be capricious enough to turn her away.

She had to stop and gather her breath. She wanted more than anything to get to the top but right now, she needed to find some shade. Her mouth felt dry. She sat down on a step out of the sun, wishing that she had, after all, got some water. Looking up, she could no longer see the monastery. Something

clutched at her heart. Would it be there for much longer? Would Error 404 succeed at destroying the underground warehouse with its priceless treasures?

She thought about the irony of it all. She was here on the mountain where God had given Moses the law. The ten commandments. The two tablets of stone that he had carved God's word onto. He had gone back down to reveal God's word to his people and they had rejected it. He had broken the tablets in anger and then had to come back up to do it all again.

Destroying God's word was nothing new. Making sure God's word was heard, now that seemed to be more to the point. Yet they had to keep it all protected, locked up, in a bunker.

Millions of people around the world believed that these ancient documents had been destroyed. Error 404 themselves must think that they have been successful. When would it all be revealed that those things were still in existence?

There was still a long way to go. The sun hung above her, making her shadow skip around her feet as she stepped back onto the heat-filled path. She would carry on, despite the desire she had for water. At the top, she thought, there would be something to drink.

She walked, focusing on the different heights of the steps, varying her stride, pacing deliberately, wanting to know all of the answers.

A bird of prey screeched above her, making her look up and put her hand out to steady herself on the rock beside her as it swooped, wings stretched and powerful, gliding on the currents of warm air piling up from the valley. She stood still for a moment, waiting to see if it would fly back into view. While she scanned the bleached sky, she heard something else, like a little trickle of rocks, somewhere below her on the path. She waited to see if someone was coming. Perhaps they would have some water they could give her.

No-one appeared.

She turned and continued to climb, feeling a little unnerved, feeling some of her previous panic return. She tried to return her thoughts to the eagle, the beauty of it, the fearless power of its flight. She was making progress, too. She turned a corner to see the stairs continue up through a gully to a beautiful and ancient arch at the top of it. It only took a few moments more and she was standing beneath it, looking through to a stunning view along a ridge up to the peak of the mountain. When she looked back in the direction she had come, she thought she saw a movement at the bend at the bottom of the gully. A chill ran through her. Someone was there. Following her.

Thea felt very alone. If they decided to attack her up here, no-one would know. She panicked and began to climb more quickly. Once she was round a corner, she looked around for options, for routes she could take off the steps. Where she could hide and see who it was, try to work out what to do next, perhaps double back and go back down.

She was losing precious seconds. She had to make a quick decision and pick one way that would get her off the path. A sheer wall to the right, a crumbly set of blocks leading to a small peak on her left, a slightly precipitous patch of clear ground if she climbed up a little past the sheer wall but ending in some large boulders she could hide behind.

The arch at the top of the gully was behind her but now out of sight. She had to decide. Perhaps she was being paranoid. It was just another tourist, late to climb the mountain like her, maybe at the head of a group who were climbing up behind them. She needed to relax a little, stop thinking that everyone was out to get her.

She turned to face the summit. It was close. She could see the tiny chapel on the top. A collection of stalls, too. She relaxed. There would be water there. Stallholders to help her with any aggressor who might be behind her. It would be fine. She wouldn't hide, she would keep going.

The sun beat down on the top of her head and she felt a little faint. Only a bit further, then she would be there. Her stomach began to hurt, first a little, then more insistently. She would need to sit down again. Her vision blurred and she needed to shut her eyes. How could she be so stupid? If only she had not been in such a panic… she really should have gone back for water.

She needed to get into the shade but it was a little way up the path. She lay back, leaning on a rock, wanting to vomit in the hot sun.

She would just close her eyes here for a moment or two, then move. Her stomach jabbed at her, intensifying with an insistent twist in her gut. She tried to curl, doubling herself up to ease the pain.

Her mind flitted briefly back to the person below her on the path, catching up with her. Would they help her?

She sat down with a jolt as the world span, the dark red rocks, and white sky swirling, a loud hum starting up in her ears and driving on, opening up to a broad full symphony of discordant, flailing noise. She would vomit right here, all over the holy earth.

But she didn't.

The next thing she knew, all was quiet, dark and cool. So peaceful. Her breathing came easily and her body felt light. The ground moved along below her, yet it required no effort and everything so stayed so calm and still.

Dad sat next to her, talking.

"You're alive." She said, trying to push words through lips of swollen rubber. "You were there, on the path?"

"Drink this." She heard his words echo and repeat themselves in a rushing flow of perfect sound. Her head was supported and she tried to open her mouth. Then there was a slight pressure on her forehead and a cool trickle of liquid found its way inside her ear.

"Where were you?" she couldn't make her precise meaning clear. The blur of half-sight wouldn't allow her to pick out his face. She could only sense him, smell his reality. "I'm sorry," she said, "I didn't know…"

"You've hurt yourself," he said, "I'm going to try and clean you up a bit." His words were still echoey, heavenly almost. Imbued with a sonorous lilt

that made her wonder what had happened to him.

She still couldn't understand why it was so dark or where the sun had gone. There was pressure on her nose and cheek which stung and made her flinch. She couldn't pull up any energy, any movement of her own. She could feel every part of her body but could not do anything about it.

"It's just a cut but there's a lot of blood. I'm just going to find something to put on it."

Then he was gone.

"Dad!"

If he understood or even heard, he didn't answer. It was as though she was a child and ill and they were back in the house in Norfolk, in the spare room, which they had to move into when they were poorly. In her mind's eye, she saw the mantelpiece with its collection of ornaments from around the world. The Egyptian cat, the wooden turtle that span on its tummy, the polished shell with its mottled pattern and ridged lip, opening to a perfectly pink and luscious center, the little silver box which was never properly polished, its bubbly details bright and shiny on the peaks, encircled with black rings of what she knew now to be silver oxide. Her brother, Finn crept in, picking each thing up, exploring the sounds, the unique way they opened, the noise they made when he put them down.

She had come home.

Chapter 29 Day 32, The Cave of Moses

When she next became aware of where she was, Thea felt desperately uncomfortable. A pressure on her face turned out to be a bandage fixed around her forehead, overlapping her nose and cheek. Underneath, something stung with a vicious insistence.

She looked around and found that she was in a small cave, which explained the cool, the quiet, the echoes. Apart from her, it was empty but there was a new sound that reminded her of something. What was it? She couldn't place

it but something about it scared her. If she had to describe it, she'd identify it as a single note, like a breath over the top of a bottle. A bell sounded in the distance, dull and clanging with an irregular chime.

"Dad?" Where was he? She tried to sit up but felt so groggy. Had he left her here? She summoned up her strength and slowly pulled herself to a standing position, having to bend over because of the low roof of the cave. She shielded her eyes as she staggered to the entrance and put her head out, finally realizing what was happening outside.

A sandstorm.

She thought of Finn and couldn't picture him in her mind. She wanted to remind him once again that she was sorry, that she wanted more than anything to carry on playing the game with him.

They were out there in the storm. She had her chance now, to do the right thing, to go out there and find them, like she should have done seven years ago. A figure appeared at the entrance.

"Ah!" Simon said, "you're awake!"

"You!" she said, "so you're safe too." She wanted to believe in the dream she had had, of Dad being right there but at the same time, she instantly knew the truth behind her imaginings, "did you follow me up here?" she asked him.

He was shaking the sand from his hair, tousling it with his hand, head bent over, looking up at her words and pausing without answering her question. "This sandstorm whipped itself up out of nowhere. Amazing. Never seen anything like it!"

"He wasn't here, was he?" she said, feeling foolish but needing to know.

"Who?"

"Never mind."

She tipped her head, listening to a sound that was clear to them both over the wail of the storm outside the cave, a note that sounded with the wind passing over an unseen opening, the continuous ringing of a bell. She felt dull grief, a void open up inside her, contrasting with the reassuring peace that she had felt in her dream, her brother picking up the ornaments on the mantelpiece, the safety of the spare room in her childhood home. It all slipped away like sand, flowing away and melting into nothing.

"I dreamed that Dad was here," she said, "it seemed so real."

Simon gave her a look of sympathy, "sorry, I'm not a great replacement, I realize that." He moved to the entrance and looked out, "look, it's calming down already."

Thea moved over to where he was and saw for herself that the sandstorm was moving on. "I guess we should get back down," she said. "I've seen the top of the mountain." She looked at him, "I've told Nikolai that I'm going to move on now that I've given him the manuscript. I'm not going to stay at the monastery but I'm not sure where to go next."

"Okay," he said, heading towards the steps leading down the mountain, the last wisps of wind-driven sand whirling around his ankles, "but your options are limited."

"I've got passports and some money…"

"Farooq's family gave me this," he said, pulling a torn-out page of a notebook from his back pocket and handing it to her as they descended. We could call them. "They said to call if we needed more help," Simon said, "maybe you could go and live in the desert with the Bedouin."

Thea felt a chill run down her spine. He was just being thoughtless. She remembered the dinner when Garayan had listed everything he knew about her - it had included the death of her mother and Finn in a camping accident in the desert. Had he been listening?

A loud booming noise accompanied by a powerful vibration shook through the earth. They dropped down, holding onto nearby rocks for support and

looked with wild confusion at the landscape around them.

"Was that an earthquake?" Thea asked. She couldn't help thinking of the wrath of God that shook the mountain all those millennia ago.

"No. Look…" he pointed towards a pillar of smoke rising from behind the screen of peaks between them and the monastery, a dark, oily plume.

"What?" she gasped. They had come so soon. It was so similar to the synagogue in Cairo, where her arrival was swiftly followed by destruction. She had to remind herself that Nikolai had known about them, had believed that they would come anyway, whether she was present or not.

"We have to get down there, help them…" All thoughts of leaving the monastery had left her, she just wanted to make sure that Nikolai and his deputies were okay, the other monks, the manuscripts.

"Come on," Simon was already some ten steps ahead of her, "we have to get going!"

Going down seemed so more difficult than coming up and it felt to Thea like it was an age before they had negotiated the top section of steps and reached the arch. Once they were back in the gully, they couldn't see anything in the valley but as soon as they rounded the corner, it came into view. The monastery had a huge gash torn from the three-meter thick wall facing them, through which they could see the swathe of destruction that had plowed through the center of the Chapel of the Burning Bush and into the library. The dark, wide plume of smoke was much clearer now, swelling and shifting around the unseen wreckage within it.

Thea collapsed to her knees and fought for breath. Every fiber of her body realized that it was the fear of precisely this sort of attack that drove her desire to escape earlier. If she hadn't come up here, she would have been like they were right now; dying or badly injured.

If Simon hadn't followed her…

Thea thought about the underground storage facility, the precious documents, and manuscripts on their lit tables, their nil-biotic environment. Had it been breached? Would the extra layers of protection have worked? Would the power have been cut off? She remembered what Nikolai had told her. Only three living Logos guardians knew it was there. Plus her, replacing her father.

Were those three still alive?

Thea looked at Simon as they jogged down the remaining steps. He was coated in sand. It covered his clothing, his hair, his skin and as she looked at her arms, she realized that she looked the same. They wouldn't be spotted easily as they returned off the mountain.

As they joined the fork with the Camel trail, she heard voices. Simon didn't need any prompting as they scrambled off the path to crouch unseen behind a couple of boulders. They tried to control their breathing, panicky and fearful as they tried to work out who it might be. There was groaning and another voice was wailing. Many more were shouting and arguing. It sounded like a large group. The voices stopped suddenly, right beside the rocks where they were hiding. There was silence. Sounds like swords being drawn. Then a voice.

"Come out! Now!"

Thea's heart thumped hard and she couldn't move. Simon put his hands into the air and urged Thea to do the same. As they came out from behind the rocks, she saw a group of terrified monks, some tentatively brandishing ancient curved scimitars and other decorative weapons that they had taken as they fled from the medieval artifact exhibit in the library. They were visibly relieved when they realized it was them.

"They have taken Nikolai," the monk holding the largest scimitar said, "They have taken him into the refectory and we can hear him…suffer…they think he can tell them something but he will not reveal it to them."

"What about his deputies?" Thea asked the other two monks who knew about the underground wealth of the place.

"They are both dead."There was a pause and then a whimper started up amongst them, rising to an ululating moan which tore through Thea's heart. She was terrified by it, full of such desperation and loss but there was a message there which only she could understand.

If Nikolai did not survive this, she would be the only one left at Saint Catherine's Monastery who knew the secret of the Logos.

Chapter 30 Day 32, The Chapel of the Eagle

Thea felt deep sorrow for the monks as they mourned, pulling at their robes, watching the smoke rise from the gash that had torn through the walls of their monastery.

"Our monastery has always been a place of peace that has always been respected, by all religions." One wailed.

"How many of them were there?" Thea asked them, "we need to know who has come."

"Two helicopters. Each one fired missiles at the monastery. We are only living because we were working in the gardens and saw them flying down the valley. We escaped through the Eastern Gate and then when we saw our brothers had been hurt, we returned to give them aid. We rescued some of them, those who were still alive." He looked around at the rest of the group and Thea realized that some of them had significant injuries, their faces revealing their pain. She lifted a hand to her bandage, realizing how lucky she had been.

Thea looked at Simon to see if his reaction mirrored her own. He sat down on the sand, holding his head in his hands. At that moment she knew without a doubt that he was not part of Error 404.

"We have to help Nikolai," said Thea, "how can we get back into the monastery? Without them seeing us?"

"You've got that information right there in your rucksack," said Simon.

Thea looked at him in confusion, then swung it off, now coated in thick sand, the bag that still held Edmund's diaries and the Arabic writings with the remaining untranslated pages that she could not understand.

"Open it and I'll show you," he said, "I re-read the diaries when you were passed out in the cave. There's a map."

"You can read Arabic?"

"No, but I know what a map looks like," he turned to one of the monks, "Is there anyone here who here can?"

After a mumbled communication, a thin monk with high cheekbones and dark black hair was pushed to the front. "I can," he said.

"Read this," said Simon, "what does it say?"

Thea handed over the waxy papers, the scent following them. The monks gathered around as the monk began to read Musa's writings.

"The fortress of Justinian I holds many secrets. The thickness of its walls is the obvious defense of the structure. Its purpose is to protect the original chapel of the burning bush built by Empress Helena, mother of Constantine the Great, in the fourth century. However, there are many hidden fortifications, chambers, and passageways that many of the orders working here so diligently seem to know nothing of."

The monks looked at each other and there were murmurs of curiosity and outrage.

"Some of us have known that this place holds secret tunnels," said one, "but over the centuries many have searched for them. Perhaps we have not yet found them all."

Thea thought of the route that Nikolai had taken her on to get down to the underground facility. She remembered the carvings in the walls of the passageways that she had passed. The dungeons dug down into the red

granite of the roots of the mountains. Had these men who had lived here for so many years never seen them?

"Go on," she urged.

"Justinian wanted to protect this place from a siege. He tapped into the source of the well of Jacob's daughters and created a system of pipes to provide an additional water source to a system of caves and refuges beneath the Eastern slopes of the mountain. A small chapel at the base of the cliff of the eagle marks the location. Access to these caves has been provided within the monastery beneath the charnel house and the refectory. There may be more but in the time that I have had to investigate, these are the only shafts I have discovered."

"It's like a modern-day panic room," said Thea.

"Musa was a busy man." Simon nodded.

"He must have been exploring while Edmund was studying."

"There is no chapel on the Eastern slopes of the mountain," said one of the monks with irritation, turning and hitting at the paper with the back of his hand. "This is false. We cannot risk following the writings of this Ottoman."

"There may not be anything now," said another, "this is five hundred years old, remember. There are hundreds of chapels and mosques and hermitage sites scattered throughout this part of the desert. We know from experience, do we not, of the detailed interest that is shown by our visitors, who come here with so many different conspiracy theories about our holy place?"

"You are all ignorant," said an elderly monk, who up until this point had been silent, "you need to avoid the logic and reason that you think is a reliable guide. Listen to the words that have been read. The base of the cliff of the eagle is that one over there."

He pointed to a slab of red rock that reached up above them.

"We do not call it that anymore. The writings that I have been studying have explored the wildlife around here. A rare breed of eagles has nested here for longer than we have inhabited the valley. A study of their nesting patterns shows that they have always chosen that cliff for their nests. They have raised thousands of young there."

Thea was already picking her way across the broken ground leading to the place that he indicated, followed by Simon and the others. The route took them out of sight once again of the monastery, the broken walls of which still smoldered with dark smoke not five hundred meters away from them.

It was impossible to identify any remains of a chapel here at the base of the cliff. Thea despaired. Five hundred years was a long time, filled with many sandstorms, rockfalls, and subsidence. What hope did they have of finding evidence of anything useful? Time was running out. Perhaps they should try to get back to save Nikolai by crossing the open space in front of them, above ground. The monks had spread out and some were kneeling, digging at the sand and pulling up rocks with their hands.

She walked to the base of the cliff. There were droppings from nests above littering the ground, alongside the detritus of sticks, feathers and the tiny bones of dead chicks and prey. She recoiled as she saw something fresh, more recently picked apart. It was the remains of a small hare, its fur and guts twisted and torn around jagged bones. It looked half-eaten, perhaps dropped from the nest by mistake, half-way through a meal. She looked up to try and see where it could have fallen from. As she did so, she saw a marking on the cliff, a carving. The setting sun threw out a shadow that revealed the relief of a long line, one vertical and another horizontal. She took a few steps backward and realized that she was looking at a cross.

"Look!" she pointed, "Is that going to help us?"

Simon turned and frowned. "The bottom of the cross is strange, pointed. Is it an arrow?"

They moved quickly to the area of ground immediately below the carving but it didn't seem promising. It wasn't even sandy. Just compacted earth and stone.

"There's nothing here," she complained, frustrated and embarrassed.

"Wait." Said one of the monks. "That cross points East. In a chapel or a church, it would be on the wall above the table."

"The altar?"

The monk looked at Simon briefly and then continued, "the table would have been here. The walls would be here and here." He indicated lines and others drew them in the sand.

"This is where we should dig."

The sun had almost set. They had no spades or equipment that would make the job easier but the monks set to work and Thea saw that even the most injured men were putting the last of their available strength into the work that had to be done.

It was almost dark when the first stone was found.

"We're wasting time!" one of the monks exclaimed. "We need to abandon this. Now that it is night, we can get to Nikolai without being seen."

"I can't stay here knowing what he is going through," said one.

"Please," said Thea, "there is something here, wait to see what we can find."

"I'm going."

She watched helplessly as the monk stumbled off into the dark. There would be snipers, she thought, now that they had time to establish themselves without resistance, they would be ready for anyone trying to approach, they would use the defenses of the monastery to their advantage.

A sharp crack, like a twig snapping, made them all turn as the dark shape of their friend flopped to the ground.

Everyone fell silent and no-one spoke for a long while.

"Keep digging," whispered Thea eventually, tearing at the stones with her already-cut fingers, the sense of urgency intensified by what they had witnessed. They all knew that this was their only hope of rescuing Nikolai. It seemed so futile, so unlikely, that there would be any sort of passageway that could help them but it was their only hope if they wanted to help their friend. For Thea, he needed to survive. She couldn't cope with the thought that she was the only one who would know about the store of documents. It was a truth too heavy to bear alone. She didn't know what she would do if he died.

"Over here!" a shout came out of the gloom to her left. "A metal ring, look!"

She couldn't see anything but tried to stumble over in the darkness. Others were there before her, pulling, straining at the ring and she heard a creak, a squeal, and heave of ancient wood, a yawn and trickle of pebbles falling into a space.

"This is it!" shouted Simon.

"We have no light," Thea said with despair once more. "Does anyone have a torch? A phone? Something?"

There was silence. Then a small light illuminated, a match struck and fell into the void below them. It went out after a few seconds, giving them no idea about what lay underneath them.

"Have you got any more of those?" Thea asked tentatively.

Another match lit, "they will not last long."

"I have a candle," said another.

"Brother Ephraim. Always prepared," a gruff voice mumbled.

Match met candle and there was another pause.

"I'll go," Simon's voice said reluctantly. No-one objected and he moved into position by the light of the tiny flame held down into the hole by the monk

with the candle. He kicked against the top strut of the ladder, testing it. "Even if I fall, it can't be far," he said, trying to convince himself. There were grunts of agreement, no-one was willing to suggest otherwise. He let himself down, step by step, moving further out of the range of their sight.

"There's a strange smell down here," Simon said. "Something strong. A bit like paraffin but not quite. It's familiar. What is it?"

"Torches?" Thea asked. She remembered her father talking about a dig where they had found sticks wrapped with cloths soaked in kerosene, ready to light their way.

"No. Hand me the candle." He wasn't very far down and he grasped it easily. A few minutes passed while they waited for him to look around.

"Let me come down there." Thea insisted. There were general murmurs of disagreement before they let her go. Simon helped her down the last few steps of the surprisingly sturdy ladder. The waft of a strong scent hit her as soon as she stepped down next to him. She knew exactly what it was. It had accompanied her in a milder form ever since she cracked open the wax around the codex on Alboran.

"Bal mumu." She said, smiling in the dark. "Scented wax. Top-quality. There must be lanterns here, give me the candle." She held the tiny taper up to the top of the walls as she took a few steps forward, holding her hand above her head in case the roof got lower and sure enough, a rusty metal lamp cover emerged from the faint shadows. Its casing was perforated with hundreds of roughly hammered holes and Thea investigated the front facade of the lantern to find a latch so that she could open it. Dust filtered between her fingers as she discovered a little wire with a looped handle. She pulled it back and breathed instinctively as the wave of spicy-sweet smell reminded her of the range of emotions she had experienced over the last few weeks. She held the candle to the wick inside the lantern and it guttered for a few seconds before flaring up to give a strong, constant light. It threw the rest of the passageway around them into a soft pale white glow. There were other lanterns too, dull and tarnished from no doubt sparkling beginnings, Ottoman designs, beautiful in their simplicity and effectiveness.

The monks spilled down into the passageway, forcing Thea and Simon on down into the space that lay ahead of them, lighting each lamp as they came to it, knowing that they could trust Musa, knowing that they had a chance now to find Nikolai, to save him and, for Thea, to make sure that the secrets were hidden from Error 404 forever.

Chapter 31 Day 32, The Refectory

As the group of monks led by Thea and Simon filed down the passageway, they could hear voices. A fork in the path in front of them offered a choice of two directions but the voices drew them down the left-hand route.

"We are below the refectory," whispered the old monk, "I can smell stale cabbage."

"We never have cabbage, Matthias."

"Perhaps not. But that room always smells of it."

It was difficult to tell where the sounds were coming from. They pressed on for as long as the could as silently as possible. The monks had detached some of the lanterns from the walls and carried them but now they left them on the ground so that they wouldn't be seen up ahead.

"Look!" Simon nudged Thea. A set of stairs loomed out of the darkness. They climbed them, a spiral up from the depths, carefully looking around each next turn as they moved, worried that something might be heard, that they might give their presence away. The monks hovered at the bottom, holding back.

"Tell me, old man, how do you think this will end?" Thea and Simon looked at each other, recognizing Daran Garayan's voice. Its distinctive, strong British accent cut into the ancient depths of the place and his sarcasm made a mockery of the influence and honor held by Nikolai and his predecessors. This proved it. Garayan was at the heart of Error 404.

"Do you hope that you will die quietly in your sleep?" he continued, "what is it that you believe about your passage from this world to the next? I have

been taught by religion that death is about nothing but suffering and suspicion and violence. Don't you agree?"

No-one else spoke. Sharp, loud footsteps, even and menacing, spiked through the flagstones separating the floor of the refectory from the passageway beneath it. Simon and Thea's stairs had delivered them to a small chamber below a grate. The light filtered through it, answering Thea's previous question. The electricity was still working. So the facility below them would still be safe.

Garayan's next words struck a new fear into Thea's heart.

"Nikolai, the intelligence that we have intercepted tells us that the monks here hold a secret about the Logos. I would like you to help me now and give up the hidden things in this place."

"You have destroyed everything." Nikolai's voice was shaking, feeble, but resolute. "Your bombs have taken our precious library and our most holy site of the burning bush."

"Oh really, a few torn documents and a thorn tree? That's all that generations of Logos members have been protecting? Come on, I know that there is more."

"They may not mean anything to you but they are precious to us. They represent God's word and they symbolize our eternal relationship with him through his son Jesus Christ. But that is all they are in the end, symbols. The most precious part of our relationship with him is within us. It cannot be seen and it cannot be destroyed."

"That's useful," spat Garayan.

"It's the truth. He lives in our hearts by His Spirit. The forgiveness of Christ brings us peace with Him. You can never break in and damage that."

Garayan coughed and Thea could hear the anxiety creep into his voice. "Error 404 has successfully destroyed much that is precious to Christianity

and other religions too. People seem upset by that but they haven't been flocking to tell me that forgiveness is more precious."

"Have you stopped to listen to them?"

A pause.

"I still need to know what you have here. There is more to find, I know it!"

"What drives you, Mr. Garayan?" asked Nikolai. "What do you hope to gain through all this destruction?"

Thea and Simon looked at each other as they heard Garayan bite back, "it's not rocket science, you crazy monk. There's a lot of misplaced wealth in this world. Much of it is tied up in non-sensical organizations like this one. We've done you a favor in bombing the lot. Like the stuff around the world that we've got rid of too. It's a waste of time. Go to the city, rent yourself a nice warm apartment, get a girlfriend, live a little!"

"There's got to be another reason they're here," whispered Simon, "they want something. I just can't work out what it is."

Thea knew. Error 404 had heard about the store of valuable texts but their intelligence had not revealed where it was. They were guessing but she couldn't tell Simon. She'd promised.

"I've got it." Simon suddenly sat down, flinching at the scrape of his boots against the stone floor. "I just worked it out, it all goes back to the Coronation meeting. " He hissed. "I was so naive. Thought my team was all about helping out but they were putting things in place for something much more. They weren't there to help with the Coronation, they were there to sabotage it. I wonder… no!"

"What are you talking about?" hissed Thea.

"They accused Wilson of wanting a Republic. It was so outrageous I didn't even think… but maybe, I wonder, is that where Error 404's money is

coming from? Are they siphoning off funds and resources from the British government; like me?"

A ringtone pierced the still silence. Thea and Simon both flinched instinctively but it came from inside the refectory.

"Yes." Garayan's voice. "But sir, we're almost…yes, I understand...there's no need for that…but of course, yes sir, I understand. As you wish."

"What did he want?" Foster's voice rang out, echoing around the refectory.

"He's on his way here. We meet him with the trucks at Sharm airport tonight."

"There's someone above Garayan, in Error 404?" queried Thea as quietly as she could, "who is it?"

"We need to act quickly," Garayan said, coming off the call and replacing his previous deference with his authority. "The Decider is on his way. He wants results. Let me make it simple for you, Father Nikolai. I know that the library, which we have destroyed, is not the real reason the academics spend their time here. There is something else, something more important to the integrity of what you do here. Although my organization has eliminated every significant ancient document, parchment, papyrus, and piece of paper around the world, anything that could lend support to authenticating the ancient origins of the Bible, there's something about your community that hasn't yet been touched. You still have a purpose and determination in your mindless beliefs. You are hiding something."

"Has it occurred to you," said Nikolai, his soft but confident tones only just reaching Simon and Thea's hiding place, "that authentication of God's word might only be a small step towards the truth? That the faith we have is given life by the reality of the divine at work, living within us, a truth and reality far more important to us than historical and archaeological proof?"

"But if you cannot prove that your Bible is true, anyone can say that you have made it all up! You lose everything!"

"Is that your premise?" Nikolai asked quietly. "Is that why you have destroyed so much?"

"There is no hope for Christians now. None."

"I'm sorry, my friend, but Christian hope is the one thing that you can never get rid of. It exists beyond manuscripts and scraps of papyrus. It lives in the hope that comes through the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ."

"Shall I do it?" asked Foster's chill voice.

"No," Garayan's voice was a warning, an order, "not yet. Put the gun down."

"Why?" Foster replied, " There's nothing here. We've wasted our time. It's just a few mad monks in black skirts."

"He's bluffing," Garayan insisted, "I promise you, there's more here, we just need to keep on looking."

"Perhaps I am mad," Nikolai said softly, "perhaps we all are …"

A sharp crack resounded around the refectory and the air flinched within the space where Thea and Simon crouched.

A thud on the floor and an angry shout from Garayan confirmed Thea's worse fears.

"You imbecile!" he shouted at Foster, "you've shot our only lead!"

"Is he dead?" asked Simon, his response too loud, making Thea flinch.

"There's someone down there." There was a skittering of boots and clicking of guns as the grate was hauled up, shafts of light shining into their tiny space.

Foster dropped into it, almost on top of them and pointed a machine gun at them both. It took him a few seconds to get used to the dark but Thea knew

how itchy his trigger finger could be and did not risk kicking out.

"Who's there?" he asked.

"It's us," said Thea, stepping into the light from the refectory above. She felt unbelievably calm as she allowed herself to be dragged up into the dining room and watched Simon receive the same treatment. Garayan gave him a couple of punches, too. Mocking, bullying.

"You two again. No dinner for you this time. Maybe you can be a little more grateful and tell us what is going on here."

"I always thought you were an idiot," muttered Simon. A crack around the face rewarded his words but he kept his gaze level with Garayan's. "What do you want?" he asked, "this is all a bit over the top, even for you."

"The world's going to change," said Garayan, "I hope you're ready."

Foster ordered gunmen in from their posts at the door of the Refectory to tie them to two chairs. How dare they? Thea felt the hate grow to a steady pressure within her. She shook against the bonds that held her wrists to the chair and tried to shout out but the gag around her mouth was too effective.

"Simon Derridge." Daran Garayan said, frowning, turning to him, "what a pity. You had such promise. When I think about you at the start of your internship, taking you to that meeting at the palace. We all thought you were the real deal."

"I did everything you asked of me, thinking I was working for my country," he said, breathing hard, "first you and then Wilson. He wanted me to discredit the Bible and I went along with it, thinking it would be easy. But you're the wrong one. Whether you agree or disagree with the message of Christianity, I know now that there is historical and archaeological evidence that it is the same message as it has always been. It's not been changed throughout the centuries. The academic scholarship behind its transmission is sound and you're not going to convince sensible people otherwise."

"That's all a bit irrelevant now, don't you think? Wilson never really needed your help. We're just trying to tie up a few loose ends now. This Logos group is one of them. We've been tracking them for the last five years. All the intelligence leads here, to this place. This where all the manuscripts end up, although that hardly makes sense to me. They all come here eventually, for some reason. We watched your father return here several times, Theodora Agnes Summers, attracted by more than a couple of monks and their prayers. I have a feeling that you, in particular, know what I'm talking about."

Foster walked over to remove her gag and Thea wished that she had the strength to break her bonds. She wanted to shout every obscenity she knew at Garayan even though he was just taunting her, telling herself not to react. He wanted her to give herself away, to tell him exactly what she wanted to know. She had to calm herself down and breathe regular, even breaths. The coarse cloth ripped between her teeth as Foster removed it and she licked her lips, staring back at the senior civil servant with disgust.

"So, Theodora Summers, why did your father come here so often?"

She was the only one who knew. Now that Nikolai and the other two deputies had been killed, the knowledge that she had about the underground facility was hers alone. Perhaps there were others around the world, members of the Logos, who knew; but right here, now, no-one else had a clue that beneath them were the real finds, the archaeological wonders of the past couple of thousand years, preserved for the future. Those documents needed protection and this was now her job.

"He never talked about what he did."

"I find that difficult to believe."

How ironic, that she had ended up having to persuade him of the truth. "Seriously, he never mentioned it."

"Do you believe in God, Thea?"

She hadn't expected that. A month ago, she would have answered with a sharp and definitive negative. Now, she paused. She wasn't going to articulate a very complex set of thoughts and feelings to him. Feelings so personal, so bound up in the terrors and fears of the past and the exhaustion and strain of the present that she couldn't begin to explain what she thought even if she tried.

So she made it simple. "Yes."

It was easier once it was out. And, she realized, true. Garayan sauntered towards her, half folding his arms. "So, in a way, we've failed." He said, smiling. "I was trying to get people to turn away from God but, for you, at least, it's been the opposite. I'm afraid it doesn't change anything. I still need to know what they've got here. I did a quick check of the library and that's all certainly gone but there's more, I know it. Just need to know where."

There was a knock at the refectory door. Another gunman put his head in and coughed apologetically.

"Think you might want to see this, Sir." He said. There was a faint sound of music outside, a chanting, like singing. It reminded Thea of morning prayers in the Chapel of the Burning Bush.

The monks who had been with them down in the tunnel filed in one by one, each of them singing their haunting chant. It was the exact one they had sung this morning. She remembered that it was based on Psalm 119

The law of the Lord is perfect…

Each one of them carried something in front of them, a manuscript, a codex, a scroll of parchment, a piece of papyrus.

Thea blinked and stared. It looked as if they had raided the facility, brought out everything that had to be kept there. Was it to protect her? She kicked against the chair in frustration.

"What are you doing?" she screamed at them. They did not turn to her or slow down, they just continued their deliberate march, bringing all of the

treasures from below up to deliver to Garayan just as he had asked.

Garayan smiled at her distress and went to inspect the first monk's offering.

"Thank you." He intoned, like a patronizing uncle, "that will do very nicely."

The monk smiled a strange smile at him and placed the manuscript on the surface of a long wooden table, as though he was giving someone a plate of food. The next did the same, and the next until all of them stood around the perimeter of the refectory with the archaeological finds of the last two thousand years or more laid out in front of them like a banquet.

Even now, the bacteria and environment will be eating into them, destroying them irreparably, thought Thea. She reflected on the types of chemicals that might be used to clean the tables, the explosives in the air wafting around after Nikolai had been shot. She felt the sadness of the tragedies of the past eight years of her life well up inside her and began to sob. Garayan passed along the tables, followed by Foster, both of them feigning reverence, grinning like cats.

"Well, that's all very useful. Thank you. The Decider has said that rather than getting rid of this lot in our usual manner, we will use it for a particularly public destruction. You see, Thea, although you have changed your mind about what you believe, you are alone in that. Most people cannot wait to have the way made clear for them, to allow them to live life without the idea of a God to control them. We're going to give them a clear path. We want to help them to be free. They will thank the Decider for it, maybe even by electing him as their Republican President one day."

One of the monks cleared his throat. "Miss Summers also has something that she needs to present to you. We have all given you the documents that are most precious to this place. She has something that belongs here, too."

Thea stared at him. What could he possibly mean? Did he want the Sinai Codex pages that she had found on Alboran? Did he not know that Nikolai had taken them from her?

"It is in your bag, Miss Summers. You need to declare it too. It smells so sweet, the word of God. It is beautiful, is it not? But we must give these things up now to survive."

She automatically opened the flap of the rucksack, wondering what he could be talking about. Sweet smelling, the wax that covered the Codex and the sheets with the diary entries on them. Edmund and Musa, telling the stories of their adventures. Was that what he meant? She pulled them out.

"So you thought you could hide something, did you?" Garayan laughed, striding over and snatching the papers away. He peered at the writing and Thea realized that although he was looking at the Arabic, he couldn't understand it.

"How important is this to you?" he asked.

The monk stepped in, "It is a fifth-century copy of the book of Revelation," he said, "one of our finest treasures. Miss Summers has unfortunately been interested in keeping it for herself."

Thea played along, still not fully understanding. "I wanted to study it a little more," she said, please, let me keep it for a little while and I will hand it back to you after that, I promise!"

Garayan's eyes lit up as Foster handed the parchment to him.

"Well, this is all very wonderful. I thank you all. I'm sure you won't mind helping us to package this lot up and we'll get out of your hair. Thea and Simon, we'll be needing you to accompany us back to London, I'm afraid. Can't let you out of our sight again."

Thea looked around at the serious faces of the monks, inscrutable behind their beards. This wasn't what it seemed, she thought. What was going on? As strongboxes were brought in and the manuscripts began to be placed carefully and reverently amongst the specially designed packing materials, she took a look at some of them and almost choked with surprise. One was a Greek copy of Homer's Iliad, another was a list of requisitioned goods from the fourteenth century, another a pile of poetry written in Greek uncial

but very poorly replicating the style of a first-century writer, clearly done in the last twenty years or so.

None of this was Biblical material. The monks must have delved into another store somewhere and brought out items that could pass as whatever Error 404 were looking for.

And their lie had worked.

Chapter 32 Day 32, The Airport

They wasted no time. The strongboxes were filled with the relatively worthless reams of parchment and the monks and Thea behaved in a sufficiently irritated and annoyed manner to continue the charade that they were being divested of their greatest treasures. Simon, it seemed, still didn't know what was going on.

"They're going to kill us," he insisted in a whisper, as they sat together, hands tied to refectory chairs, watching the monks being used as labor to get the helicopters loaded. "I don't understand why they haven't done it already. They've got nothing to gain from keeping us alive."

Foster and Garayan had both gone outside to supervise the loading procedures, leaving a few gunmen in the refectory, watching them like hawks. The monks worked slowly and deliberately, moving carefully amongst the manuscripts, picking them up and taking them out like automatons. Thea saw Matthias try to catch her eye as he moved to the open doorway and collapsed in a heap. The monks nearest him set down their apparent treasures and gathered around him, wailing and ululating as they had done on the mountain.

"Stop that noise!" shouted the gunmen, moving towards them, turning away from where Thea and Simon were sitting. At the same time, another group of monks moved silently, creating a screen between them. The door was on one side, the chamber through the grate in the floor on the other.

Thea felt her chair being lifted and carried smoothly as the bonds at her wrists and ankles were cut. She hopped off it and jumped into the chamber, followed closely by Simon.

"You have little time." Said Gregory, blinking at them, "follow the lanterns that we have laid out for you. Extinguish each one as you pass it and they will not track you. You will know when to stop and then you will be safe. We will deal with them up here."

"Come on," said Simon, pulling at her hand, "there's no time."

"Thank you!" she mouthed before they ran down the spiral staircase and saw the first light showing itself around a slight curve in the passageway. They ran as quickly as they could in the gloom and snuffed out each flame as they passed, seeing the next like a beacon some way ahead of them. Thea couldn't tell how far they went or how long it took but the passages descended, ascended, curved and spiraled. Staircases appeared and disappeared, other passages dived off to the left and right but they continued to follow the clear trail of lanterns that the monks had set out for them.

Finally, a brighter light shone down a passage that had opened up more than any before it. The air felt warmer and less humid and the smell of musty rock was infused with a sharper, more acidic smell that seemed somehow more modern, more like somewhere she had been before.

She had. And the monks had known about the underground facility after all. They had just been very good at hiding it and great at creating a diversion.

They had arrived at the foyer where Nikolai had brought her on that first day when they arrived. A row of bio-suits, helmets, computer terminals, bright white floors and ceilings and a hum of intention revealed the entrance to the facility. The relief that she felt was immense. Thea turned to look at Simon, to gauge his reaction. His face contorted in the same confusion, amazement and hope that she had felt the day before.

"What is this place?" he asked, bewildered.

"I'm not sure if I should tell you," she replied.

"You don't trust me?"

"I just think it's better if you don't know. One less thing to get questioned about."

"Okay," he said, grinning, "but I'm guessing that this is what Garayan is asking about? What they want to destroy?"

"Exactly," Thea said, feeling a new concern, "Now that I know where we are, I want to see if another room is still intact. My Dad's study."

"So he has been here a lot."

"Yes, come on, it's up this way."

She led him up the staircases and through spaces in false walls that led to the corridor that lying just below the library. She had fully expected this area to be destroyed, just like the rest of the library, just like that crater at the British Library.

The feeling that Dad was with her in the cave at the top of the mountain had been so strong. She had sensed him there, her imagination providing all that she had longed for. The hope that she had felt up there returned to her now, with the additional disappointment and grief of being conscious, of knowing that he could not be alive. She sighed as she pushed down the handle of his study room and swung the door open.

It had been thoroughly searched and turned over, just like the flat back in London. She knew that they wouldn't have found anything here. She thought of them up there now, packing those far less significant manuscripts into the strongboxes, thinking of them as Biblical treasures that still lay safe beneath them.

"They're going to get away with this, aren't they," said Simon in a voice of stone. "We've got to break cover, call counter-terrorism. We've got as far as we can with this. Now we need help. MI6."

"Well phone them then. Let's do it. Error 404 has to be stopped."

"We haven't got a phone."

They looked at each other, still covered in a fine coating of red from the sandstorm, Thea without the rucksack that was still in the refectory, along with the 'valuable' segment of Revelation that she'd been 'stealing'.

"We're going to have to find one."

Thea drew a deep breath. "Let's go, then," she said, setting off out of the room and up the corridor. Simon followed, but not before he'd done a quick search of Henry Summer's desk, where he found a torch, a curved knife in a scabbard and a small derringer pistol. "Your Dad was so unbelievably Indiana Jones!" he said, throwing the knife back into the drawer, switching the torch on and pocketing the pistol. "I can't believe you never knew!"

The corridor was dark but after a few twists and turns which they picked out with the dying beam of the unwilling torch batteries, they were suddenly confronted with a pile of rubble which opened up to the skies. They had reached the bombed section where the roof had collapsed and parts of the rubble were still smoldering. Thea could see parchments, broken glass, exhibits from the library strewn around them. As they picked their way up the destroyed ramp of broken concrete, they heard the engines of the trucks starting up.

"They're leaving!" Simon said, "come on!"

They could see the rear of a truck backing in through the main entrance, its rear lights throwing the archway into a fiery luminescence. The canvas flap had not been tied tightly enough and there was enough time for Thea and Simon to jump into the back and hide inside before it moved away.

Thea's ribs ached on impact with the metal of the tail-gate as she vaulted it. She rubbed them after landing inside, bent over, grimacing. She could see the strongboxes stacked confidently in front of her. Smiling at Simon in the darkness, she was convinced that this was the right course of action.

"We still don't have a phone," she said.

"At least we haven't lost them," Simon said, "now we've just got to keep out of sight."

Thea had no idea how long the journey to the airport took, but it felt like forever, as they rocked and bumped over the unmaintained roads. Although she had no idea what the time was, she caught the odd flash of sky through the flapping canvas above her. The stars burned as fiercely as they had the

night before when she had been dazzled by them on the roof of the guesthouse. If the creator God was there, then, was he with her now?

She had little control over her thoughts and as the adrenaline subsided, she grew colder and began to shiver. Simon noticed and drew her close to him. "Stay strong," he insisted, "Can't have you wimping out now." She let him hold her, partly for the warmth but mostly because she didn't mind.

When the trucks pulled up in front of some large hangers, they moved quickly to the back of the boxes, trying to keep out of sight. "We need to get one of them on their own, knock them out to keep them quiet and get their phone," Simon said, pulling out the derringer.

"Shouldn't we just try and get across to some public place in the airport, like departures?"

"I don't think we're at that kind of airport, Thea."

She peeked through a gap in the canvas and realized that he was right. It all looked a bit industrial. No jumbo jets, luggage trolleys or airline branding.

"Okay. Let's go with your idea then," She breathed in deeply, not ready for this. She hoped that Simon knew how to use a gun.

The engines of the lorries switched off and they heard another noise in the distance, engines of an entirely different type, whizzing and squealing with a much greater force. A clang and scrape of metal followed, accompanied by heavy footsteps.

"He's here," Garayan's voice came from the front of their truck as the door opened and he got out, "Hello Sir."

"What a ghastly flight that was," a booming voice said, "it had better be worth my while. Let's see what you've got."

Thea saw a shadow pass over Simon's face as his eyes narrowed in a beam of light slicing across the truck's interior.

"Wilson. It's George Wilson," he spat, gripping the pistol.

"I don't want to spend any more time in this God-forsaken place," the Deputy Prime Minister's voice continued, "what have you got?"

Garayan coughed. "It's a triumph, Sir," he said. Thea heard the anxiety in his voice. Felt a tiny bit sorry for him, knowing that he was right to be worried. This shipment wasn't what he thought it was.

"We've got quite a haul from the monastery," he continued, "the treasures of Logos. There's enough to use for the purposes you had in mind."

"So, the Logos hub. Well done. The hidden texts? The ones that didn't get near the museums or the libraries? Fantastic."

Simon gripped onto Thea's arm. "I was working for this man!" he said. "I started following his orders! He had me working for Error 404…"

Thea reflected on the monks and their suspicion of Simon. They had been right about him, after all, their intelligence must have warned them of his associations with Wilson. Without even realizing it, he had carried out some of their plans.

The conversation outside the truck continued. "Yes, Sir, the chatter was accurate. Please, come and see." Garayan barked an order and Thea and Simon heard the scraping of a strongbox as it was pulled from their truck and dumped onto the tarmac.

"What's this crap?" Wilson exclaimed, "this isn't what I asked for!"

"But, Sir, it's…" Garayan started.

"No-one would give a rat's arse if this lot disappeared!" Wilson said. "Who verified it?"

"Well," Garayan stuttered, "the monks, they said…"

"And you believed them? You're a complete amateur, Daran. I guess I'll be doing it myself, again. Take me to the monastery."

Through a gap in the side of the canvas, Thea watched as Garayan and Foster looked at each other in disbelief but her excitement chilled immediately when she realized that one of the gunmen had discovered them.

"Hey! Look here!" the shout caught Wilson's attention and Simon raised his hands, the derringer clattering to the floor of the truck. Thea sighed, holding her arms up, as they were pushed out of the end of the truck onto the tarmac of the runway. Warmth still rose from it, releasing the heat of the day now passed, despite the chill of the night air that stabbed right through her.

"You again," Garayan said, evenly, recovering, "that's very useful. Perhaps you could tell us where the good stuff is."

Simon ignored him from the kneeling position that he had been forced into, his hands behind his head, more interested in challenging Wilson, "Hello Sir," he said.

"Derridge," said Wilson, smiling faintly, "funny how things go sometimes. I'd thought you were a rising star, thought I could recruit you."

"Those special assignments you gave me. You played me. I was so flattered, thought I was working for the British Government but you were manipulating me to help Error 404," said Simon, "you used me to track the Logos. You know the sentence for traitors, don't you."

Wilson laughed, "You were so helpful, too. Leading us straight to their base in Cambridge like that. Once we searched that bunker at the University Library and found the information we needed in Grayson's office, the rest was easy."

"What do you want?" Simon asked, "what have you got against religion anyway?"

"We need to reset civilization," Wilson said, "We think we're so advanced and liberated but this insidious belief in God persists. Our legal systems, our constitutions, the church, the monarchy… now that Error 404 has made

so much progress, the way is clear to create a new society that can operate without the appalling pressures of the past."

"I don't understand," said Simon, "if you wanted a Republic, couldn't you get what you wanted through politics? Why did it have to involve so much destruction? So many people dying?"

Wilson sighed, "You're young and new to all of this, Simon. I'm fond of you, I am, but I can't let you return to the UK knowing what you do. Unless you have some more specific knowledge that you can offer to us about some original manuscripts that my incompetent operatives managed to miss back at the monastery?"

Simon tried hard not to glance at Thea but his eyes flickered enough to direct Wilson's attention to her anyway. "Or, are you the one I should be talking to, my dear?"

"She's got nothing to do with it," said Simon, "I'm the one you need to talk to."

Garayan drew in a satisfied breath, clearly glad to be able to offer something of substance, "she's the expert, sir, the archeologist's daughter. I think she knows exactly what you're talking about."

Thea looked at him without any fear. "Even if I did, I know something now that I didn't before. People won't stop believing in God just because you tell them to. Nothing that you can destroy will wipe out the faith of those who believe in it. The word of God that you think rests in old parchment and papyrus is more deeply ingrained in this world than you can ever imagine. It is not just in the copies of scribes but in the millions of copies of the Bible, on paper, in digital formats, in notebooks, talks, essays, arguments and commentaries throughout history. It is littered throughout literature, through the novels and plays and poems of the ages, it is written in the law, carved in stone, it flutters in decorations, is hidden in the platitudes and memories and on the gravestones of the world. But most of all, it is written in the flesh of the hearts of men and women who know what it means to trust and believe in the Lord God. You can't erase or discredit it using a

terrorist organization. Your Error 404 has all the power of a toddler trying to blow out a forest fire."

A moment of silence, as everyone reeled, looking towards Wilson, waiting for his reaction. Foster tensed up, pulling the semi-automatic to his chin.

"Oh put it down," waved Wilson, "and put all of this junk in a truck with Derridge sitting on top of it. We'll torch the lot. Then we'll get on with the job that I wanted doing in the first place."

Chapter 33 Day 32, The Desert

The world span as Thea processed Wilson's intentions. Simon couldn't die for the sake of the manuscripts. Yet so many others, like Nikolai, had done so.

"Thea!" Simon's quiet voice cut into her thoughts, "he was going to kill us anyway. He's just doing it like this to get what he wants. You must not tell him anything, promise me? No matter what."

Garayan nodded to the gunmen who held Simon as the rest of them finished throwing the pile of useless manuscripts onto the growing stack on the runway. He struggled a little but seemed resigned to this fate as they pushed him onto it, holding him down while they tied his ankles together.

There was a moment's silence and Thea sobbed, wrestling with her captor and her conscience, as everyone waited for the command to begin. She shut her eyes and found her desperation turning to prayer.

Help us if you're there, God. Please.

She felt a trembling resonance run through her. The others heard it too. A growing rumble from the desert mountains, distant but tangible. A slight breeze caught some of the loose, lighter pieces of parchment and they skittered lightly across the smooth surface of the runway. One of them flicked up and wrapped itself around Thea's ankle. Instinctively she twisted herself around so that she could bend her knees and pick it up with her hands behind her back. She knew immediately that it was part of Edmund's

writings, with Musa's Arabic on the back. Even as she held it behind her back, she could breathe in its beautiful scent, the smell of adventure, of the island, of the desert, of relief, of discovery and promise. It gave her hope.

The rumble grew louder, more persistent. Wilson was peering into the gloom, forgetting Simon.

"What is that?" asked Daran, squinting into the darkness, "that noise, it's coming from the mountains."

Could it be a sandstorm? The stars were clear above them but a bright glow showed itself on the horizon, bright white, the tip of a large disc, the moon, rising, lighting up a cloud of dust that drew their attention away from the drama of the pile of manuscripts.

Wilson and Garayan were fully distracted now and the gunmen looked uneasy. The noise grew louder, steadily deepening and broadening in its tone until it became like thunder, like the galloping of a thousand hooves. The gunman held Thea more tightly but she could tell it was out of fear as he shifted nervously, repositioning his automatic with his free hand so that it pointed into the desert. Some of the others showed their nerves and began shooting the odd round into the direction of the noise. The rising moon spread a smoky pale light over what looked like a dark liquid mass, flowing down the hill beside the airport and on towards the runway. It was accompanied by a soupy cloud of thick dust, which hid the aggressors within it.

Wilson was thoroughly spooked. He strode towards the steps of his jet, "get the engines started!" he shouted, "Let's go!"

Garayan and Foster raced after him but he turned and pulled up the steps before they got there. "Not you." He shouted down at them, "You stay and finish this."

They stood in horror as the door of the jet closed and took a few steps backward to avoid the wing of the plane as it swung round to position itself on the runway. Wilson's face could be seen at the window, complacent and calm.

Garayan turned and ran to the nearest truck, pulling open a door and leaping inside while Foster and the other gunmen registered what was happening, leaving their captives and following his lead.

"What is it?" said Thea, having to raise her voice to be heard above the increasing noise.

"I think it's the Bedouin!" shouted Simon.

As the trucks left them there on the tarmac, pulling away with screeching tires and escaping in the opposite direction to the oncoming fury, Thea was free to run over to Simon, her wrists still tied, with no way to free his feet, no choice left but to watch as the events unfolded in the light of the now dazzlingly full moon.

The volume of the mass of engines was immense, it pummeled through the desert and spilled onto the end of the runway and Thea realized at that point that Wilson's jet would not have room to take off. It sat facing them, the lights on the tips of its wings blinking placidly, pointing up the tarmac mile to the melee of horses, jeeps, motorbikes, and quadbikes that made up the arsenal of the modernized desert nomads. The jet's engines were powered to their full extent, squealing to a high-pitched whine as they mustered up the courage to advance, but in the light of the moon, Thea picked out a humvee at the front of the pack with a fixed position rocket launcher aimed straight at the plane. Thea could see the determination of the men around beside it and as she watched, a rocket fired from it, straight at the nose of the jet as it advanced. It pierced the window of the cockpit and the long capsule exploded from within with an orange and yellow flame, skittering a blast that reached back towards the humvee and out to Simon and Thea, throwing them all to the ground in a heady daze.

The next thing Thea knew, she was roughly pulled to her feet and brought face to face with a bearded man who shouted broken English at her. "You Error 404?" he demanded. "You destroy monastery?"

"No!" she yelled back, "I was helping monastery, I am a friend of the monks!"

"You kill monks!" the man said, shaking his gun. Terrified, she looked around for Simon. He was being held by another wild-looking nomad who seemed just as unrelenting as the one who challenged her.

The wreck of the private jet burned behind them, its heat scorching Thea's back as she lolled, dazed and terrified, waiting for the shot that would finish her as the Bedouin continued to shout his threats.

"Stop this!" a little voice sounded, high-pitched and insistent above the roar of engines and motorbikes performing doughnuts and wheelies on the inviting tarmac, "this is Miss Theadora Agnes Summers, one of those we must protect! We brought these two from Cairo to save them from Error 404."

Thea burst out laughing with relief as Farooq appeared, pulling at the arm of her captor, his bright eyes reflecting the fire of the jet as they burned with outrage.

"Her ancestor traveled the ancient paths with our people," the precocious eleven-year-old said, squirming into position behind her and releasing her hands from the cable tie.

"You saved our lives, again." Thea said, "what brought you here?"

"We protect the monastery," he shrugged, "for over a thousand years our people have helped the monks."

The man bawled at Farooq in Arabic, grabbing Thea back from him and waving his gun around.

"You come from America and destroy everything and take what you want! You pay for this!" he grasped her wrist and saw what she held in her hand.

"Even now, you take from that holy place! Look!"

She was still clutching the page that had wrapped itself around her ankle, the page of Edmund and Musa's writings. Thea looked around in desperation but Farooq's face lit up.

"No! This is proving it!" he said, "please listen!" he pointed to the page. "That page is written by the Muslim friend of her ancestor, a pilgrim who came here five hundred years ago."

The man finally turned to listen to him, "what are you saying?"

"Please read it," Farooq said, "see what it says, the Arabic."

The man grabbed the page and read it out loud.

For anyone who has doubts about this traveler. For the sake of the prophet Isa and the matters that are written of him in the Injil, please afford him protection. He has traveled from Sinai and will need a passage to Spain. He has shown himself to be a true servant of the word of God and has served alongside me at the Monastery of Saint Catherine beneath the holy mountain with devotion and grace.

The man paused and looked back at her, his head tipped on one side.

"We were given safe passage from Cairo to Sinai by Bedouin," she whispered, her throat parched by the dry air and heat around them, "this boy, one of your people, helped me to read these pages."

He shouted to others who clustered around and took turns, reading the old Arabic to one another, nodding and welcoming Simon and Thea, laughing to one another in the headlights that crisscrossed the runway. The old and inconsequential papyrus and parchment on the runway were flailing around, messy and torn from the blast.

The man who seemed to be their leader held his hand up to the mass of attendant bikes and vehicles around them and shouted a short order. They quickly responded, revving and zooming off into the night.

"We must go," said Farooq, "we need to return all of this to the monastery. Do you want to come back with me and my brother in our vehicle?"

He led them to a familiar, white, open-backed truck with rolled-up tents stored carefully along the sides. As they climbed up into the back, the fleet

of vehicles pulled away from the remaining wreckage with screeches of acceleration, pointing them back in the direction of Saint Catherine's. Thea and Simon held onto each other to prevent themselves from being thrown out of the vehicle as it bounced and jolted along the potholed road.

"Has someone got a phone we could borrow?" asked Simon of Farooq. A Nokia brick was passed along the row and Thea smiled as she watched him tap out the UK code followed by a number that he hid from her view. He rattled through a series of security questions.

"Get me MI6," he said, "I've got new intelligence about Error 404."

Chapter 34 7 months later, London

Thea showed her ID at the front desk with the home office insignia displayed on the wall behind it and sat as directed on the sofa in the foyer. While she waited, she thought about the six weeks that had passed since she had seen Simon last. After waving him off in Farooq's brother's truck on his way to Sharm airport, the International one this time, she had returned to her father's office deep below the monastery to continue the work she had started, helping to put the library back into some sort of order.

Simon had not left before the funerals held for Nikolai and the other eight monks who had died in the attack. He had coordinated the Sinai based part of the investigation into the attack on the monastery until a British diplomat had arrived from the embassy in Cairo, following which he had been recalled to London by his new boss at the Home Office.

The job of rebuilding and restoring the damaged parts of Saint Catherine's had already made a great deal of progress. Many Bedouin had arrived to offer their services, setting up their encampments around the outside of the monastery, even defending it from visitors who tried to take advantage of the breached walls.

Communications continued to be difficult, without any Internet connection or reliable land-line telephone. However, Simon made sure that Thea had a

good GPS phone so that she could keep in touch with what was happening regarding the dismantling of the Error 404 network.

"Thea!" the familiar voice caught her while she was still deep in thought. She looked up to see Simon in a three-piece suit and well-groomed, very different from his look in Sinai.

She smiled at him, "where are we going for lunch?" she asked.

"I haven't got a massive amount of time, I'm afraid," he said, nodding her towards the lifts, "we can grab something in the canteen while I fill you in." She picked up her bag and followed him, remembering the constant need to keep the rucksack with her while she had protected the missing part of the Sinai Codex. She thrilled with the thought that this bag contained something that would be of great significance in the coming days.

"So tell me," she said, in the lift, needing to know a range of things that Simon hadn't been able to tell her on the phone, "was Wilson the top of Error 404? Did he coordinate everything?"

"Only the British part of it," said Simon in a low voice, "others holding equally high positions of government in France, Germany, Ukraine, and Russia have been identified and all of them are now either being investigated or are in hiding. British Intelligence has shut down all Error 404 operations in the UK," he paused, "they got Garayan."

Thea looked at him, waiting for his response.

"I haven't seen him. There are internal investigations here too, of course, so I can't say much about it but they've had to make sure that he hadn't recruited anyone else in the civil service."

The lift doors opened up in a busy canteen where smartly dressed men and women lined up at a variety of dishes under light and chrome that reminded Thea of school lunches.

"How's the planning going for the big event?" Thea asked, trying to pick a topic that could be discussed in the open.

Simon grinned, "Being moved to the Cathedral detail is incredible. I'm in the Abbey most days, working through the order of service, liaising with the Palace." His voice dropped as he leaned in to talk in a whisper, "you'll like him, I promise."

"He's happy with our idea?" she indicated her bag.

Simon nodded, "he's not as objectionable to all that as he seems," he said, "he's keen that we do it properly and he's pleased that he has a chance to right a whole load of wrongs. I think his mother's ways were more important to him than everyone thought."

Thea smiled. She'd sat for long periods, watching the highly-trained scribes copy it from the original, the faithful care and skill printing each symbol and character on the aged, receptive vellum. Each word important, worthy of protection, worthy of transmission and preservation. What would he make of it? Simon read her thoughts, "You'll be fine, you don't have to say anything."

When they left the building, a car was waiting for them, official, black. Getting into the back seat, Thea realized that they were being accompanied by extra security. The car pulled away from the curb into the traffic on Whitehall, then wound its way around Westminster square and up to St James, alongside the park towards the palace.

The security checks going in were extensive but this time, the contents of her bag were revered and treated with great care. They padded up the thickly carpeted staircase to a room in the center of which was a huge table. As they walked in, the people around the table stood up and clapped. A familiar-looking, elderly man in an immaculate suit walked towards them.

"Theodora Summers, I believe?" his voice was as she had expected but he was shorter than on TV. She shook his extended hand and gave a curtsy that she hoped was the right depth. "I wanted to meet you in person to thank you for the extraordinary work that you have done in preserving a part of our heritage that others were eager to destroy. I believe that you have brought something back to life for us to use at Saturday's ceremony?"

Thea remembered herself and presented him with the white box that held the precious document. He took it from her with a small bow of his head and put it onto the table. "Let's have a look at what we have here, shall we?"

"It's Luke's gospel, copied directly from the Sinai Codex." Thea said, trying to stop her voice from trembling, "From the fourth century."

"How extremely interesting," he said, "now I believe that this is going to be a key part of the service?"

Simon stepped in. "Yes, sir. The presentation of this gospel will be accompanied by the same format of words used at your mother's Coronation;

″ Our gracious King, to keep your Majesty ever mindful of the law and the Gospel of God

as the Rule for the whole life and government of Christian Princes,

we present you with this Book,

the most valuable thing that this world affords.

Here is Wisdom;

This is the royal Law;

These are the lively Oracles of God."

Chapter 35 325AD The Serapeum

Aeschylus Primavi hurried along the raised pavement by the side of the busy Alexandrian street, dodging through the lazy evening throng of people emerging from their houses, now that the intense heat of the day had passed. The news that had arrived by messenger just twenty minutes before had put aside any desire for his usual more comfortable means of conveyance through the city and now he was tailed by his assistant who

hurried to keep up with him. Despite his age, he still had speed when he needed it, trained and exercised as he was by years of action in campaigns.

Sweat poured down his face as he arrived at the entrance to the Serapeum, its low marble portico decorated with only two of the nine Muses, the goddesses of the arts, saved from the facade of the Great Library when Emperor Aurelian took the city years before. He had no time to remember the sacrificial part played by so many in those dark days or the personal losses that he still felt. Now his interest was focused on something more wonderful.

The lone guard at the door recognized him and stood to attention, his armor clanking with efficiency behind him as Aeschylus eagerly searched the hallway for the man who had sent the message, wanting to confirm the possibility he held in his mind.

Could it be true?

Figures in white togas turned and moved aside as he jogged through the atrium on his way to the pokey administration office.

"Claudius!" he shouted, "are you there?"

A pair of attendants in dark brown tunics turned to open the impressive double doors of an inner room, just as they were flung open from within by an old, bearded figure whose expression matched his own.

"Aeschylus! I only just sent for you!"

"Is it what I think?"

The two old men held each other at arm's length for a few seconds.

"It is."

They embraced, laughing and slapping each other for a few minutes. The attendants returned to their positions, raising their eyebrows at this undignified behavior.

Aeschylus shook his head, shading his eyes as they filled with tears of relief, as Claudius guided him into his office, his old friend knowing exactly what this meant to him.

"So, just tell me, the details!" Taking the offered goblet of refreshing water he sat on the edge of the recliner, unable to relax.

"So, the Bishop has confirmed that Constantine has issued the decree we had hoped for. After just three weeks as the overall emperor, he has declared that the whole Roman Empire is to be known as Christian. There are rumors that it will be known as the Holy Roman Empire. He wants to put right the wrongs of Diocletian, my friend. He is making grand gestures, it is true, but they are gestures that will give our people what they need."

"And they are..?"

"He has decreed that all of the centers of learning and knowledge should put the majority of their scribes onto the task of producing and circulating completed codices of the scriptures to the churches around the whole Empire as soon as possible."

"So it has happened."

"Yes, my friend. All our precautions, our contingencies, have paid off. Shall we?"

The two men proceeded from the administration office along a maze of corridors to reach a cloister that ran through well-tended gardens to a second, smaller marble-clad building decorated with bas-relief sculptures of the gods of writing and the arts. The word 'Scriptorium' was engraved on the lintel of the main doorway through which they entered.

"Let us not get ahead of ourselves, my friend. You know that this can only be a political move. We only have so long before he changes his mind, or before another Emperor comes along and burns everything down again."

"Of course. I know that he views Christian growth through Asia Minor, Syria, Judea and here in Egypt, too, as a boost to the dominance of his

empire. The West is giving him too many difficulties. As Christianity grows and is united around Greek as a universal language, the Emperor knows that his support of the churches can only increase his power and popularity. With Egypt and Rome protecting the Mediterranean and the Black Sea, the northern tribes cannot advance beyond Sicily."

"Surely it is more than that! He has personal faith as well, I am convinced of it. He is convening a council to counter heresy about the deity of Jesus Christ. My son, Athanasius is making preparations for himself and the Bishop to leave for Nicea in Asia Minor."

"I very much hope that Constantine proves to be a useful tool for the spread of the gospel throughout the Empire. But now, let me show you what we have already brought up from the hidden archives, even since we heard this news early this morning."

Stepping down into the brightly-lit interior, Aeschylus marveled at the calm, quiet and studious environment. He had traveled around enough of the empire to see other libraries, most notably those at Caesarea, Ephesus, and Antioch. All of them were significantly less impressive than the historic Library of Alexandria that remained only in their memories but all of them, including their Serapeum, had the advantage that they were permitted by the Empire to operate for the reproduction of non-Christian texts and as such boasted superb, up-to-date Scriptoria facilities.

All of the energy put into precise and reliable reproduction of important writings was of course essential. Storing scrolls and parchments was fine as far as it went but with constant use and reference by the thousands of scholars poring over them over the years, not to mention the additional problems of environment, moisture, and erosion of sand and dust that seeped into the buildings no matter how clean they tried to keep them, the texts needed to be regularly replaced.

Scribes would copy texts according to the strict rules that governed their job and not one of them could risk making mistakes. They would follow their fathers and grandfathers in a trade which paid twenty times better than a manual worker. It involved learning and studying that engulfed their early years and readied them for a lifetime of copying and checking to produce

the level of the reliability that was expected by the exacting standards of the Roman Empire.

Now, thought Aeschylus, those skills are to be put into the service of the word of God.

"Let's talk about the details." He said, turning to Claudius with the excitement that still rose in his throat, "after Diocletian's purge, all the sacred texts were destroyed. That was his order, anyway. We managed to hide and protect some. Most were burned."

"We all remember those days."

"It seems as though these writings are almost impossible to keep safe," murmured Aeschylus, "no matter how hard we try."

"It is up to men such as us to ensure that they do. We must do everything in our power to continue to do so. Now see here, the scrolls and parchments that we are working from." Claudius led him to a long table with a scroll rolled out, between thirty to forty feet long.

Aeschylus took a few moments, "Greek. Ezekiel. Septuagint."

"We are going to continue writing in Greek although some are calling for a Latin version, wanting to give the people the scriptures in their language."

"But Greek is so much more precise!"

"Exactly why we are working from the Septuagint for the Hebrew scriptures. It is fitting for us here in Alexandria, is it not, that we use the Greek translation from Hebrew ordered right here in this city by Ptolemy for the Great Library over six hundred years ago. We have multiple texts to check it against where there are questions. Over here we have Origen's Hexapla. It provides us with six different translations from different centuries so that we can make correct choices where there are questions about words in our central copy."

"Marvellous. What about the gospels and the letters?"

"We have been able to bring out many copies of manuscripts hidden before Diolectian's destructive purge. We have narrowed down the best texts to use and will follow Eusebius' Canon as used in Caesarea. It is to be confirmed by the Nicean Council and I expect that we will receive news on that when your son and the bishop return in a few months."

"How many shall we send?"

"As many as we can."

"Let me be part of it. Let me write some lines, I beg of you!"

"You old fool!"

"I have still got a steady hand and the scribes will oversee every brush stroke."

Claudius nodded and smiled as he beckoned his senior scribe. "What are you working on at the moment?" he asked him.

"Psalms," he replied, "the great songs of David."

"Go on, Aeschylus," his friend laughed, "make sure you copy the scribe's style! Don't make him do the whole page again!"

Aeschylus sat on the worn wooden bench and leaned his weight on his forearm as he settled into position at the angled desk. He dipped the splayed papyrus stylus into the specially thickened ink, designed for withstanding centuries of wear. As he copied the uncial text, brushing the black liquid onto the smooth receptive surface of the vellum, he ensured that each character stood alone, without touching another, of equal height with the one either side of it. Completing the line, he sat back proudly, admiring his work.

"How long did that take me?" he asked.

"Time is less important than accuracy. You didn't make any mistakes," said the scribe who had returned. "Accuracy is everything."

"Then I am proud of my achievements. Please confirm the words that I have just written?"

"Though the earth gives way…"

"So yes, that is what I have written and I know how it continues too… though the earth gives way under my feet, though the mountains fall into the heart of the sea…" Aeschylus recited, continuing the sentence, knowing the psalm well. "I shall not fear."

As he looked at his lifelong friend, Claudius, he felt deep gratitude. After all they had been through, all they had seen in their lifetimes; now, as old men, they could openly reproduce the words that were needed to transmit God's message to the next generation and the next and the next. Without fear.

He was convinced that the Word would survive the harshest of regimes and the most deliberate of destruction.

It would endure.